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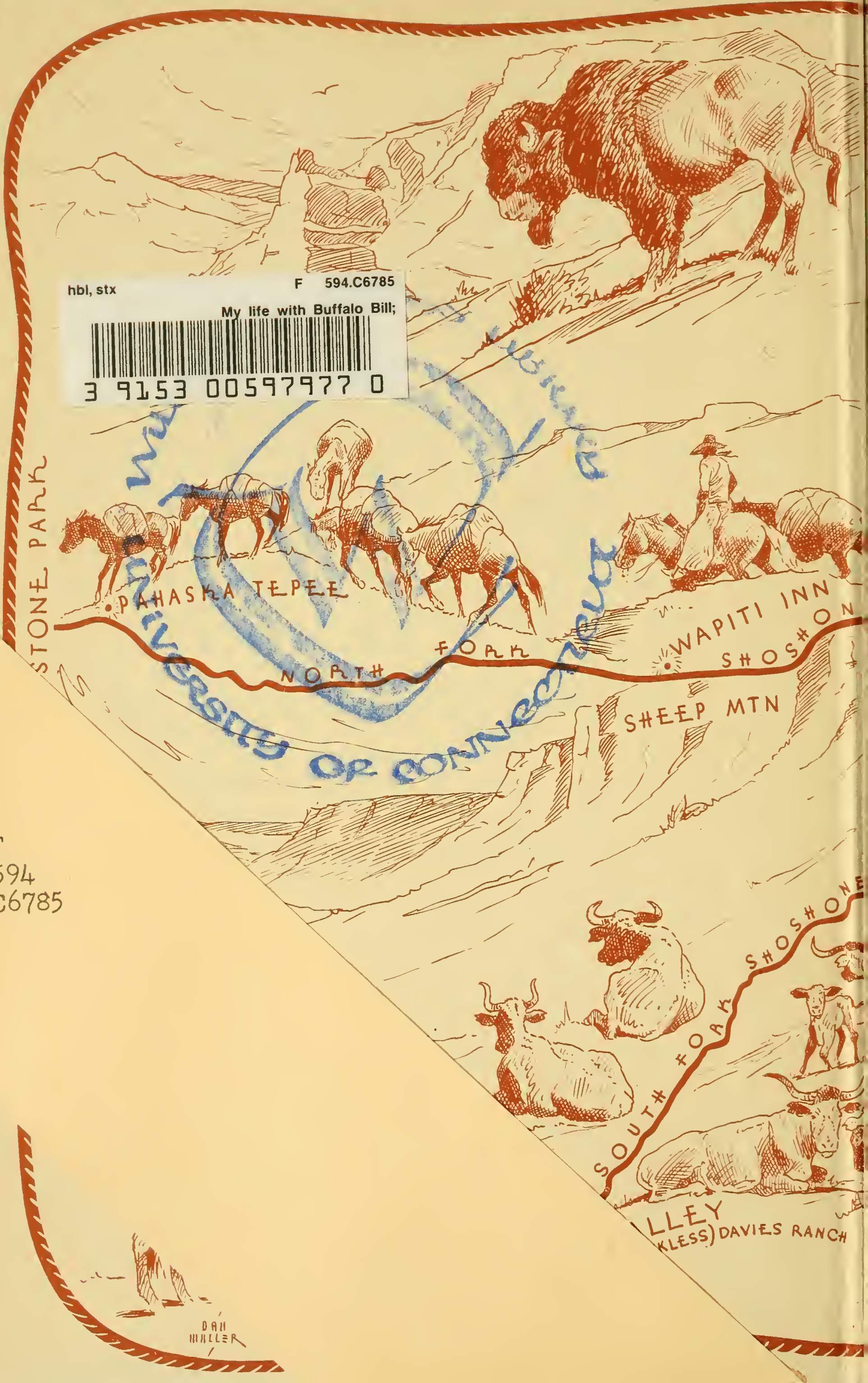
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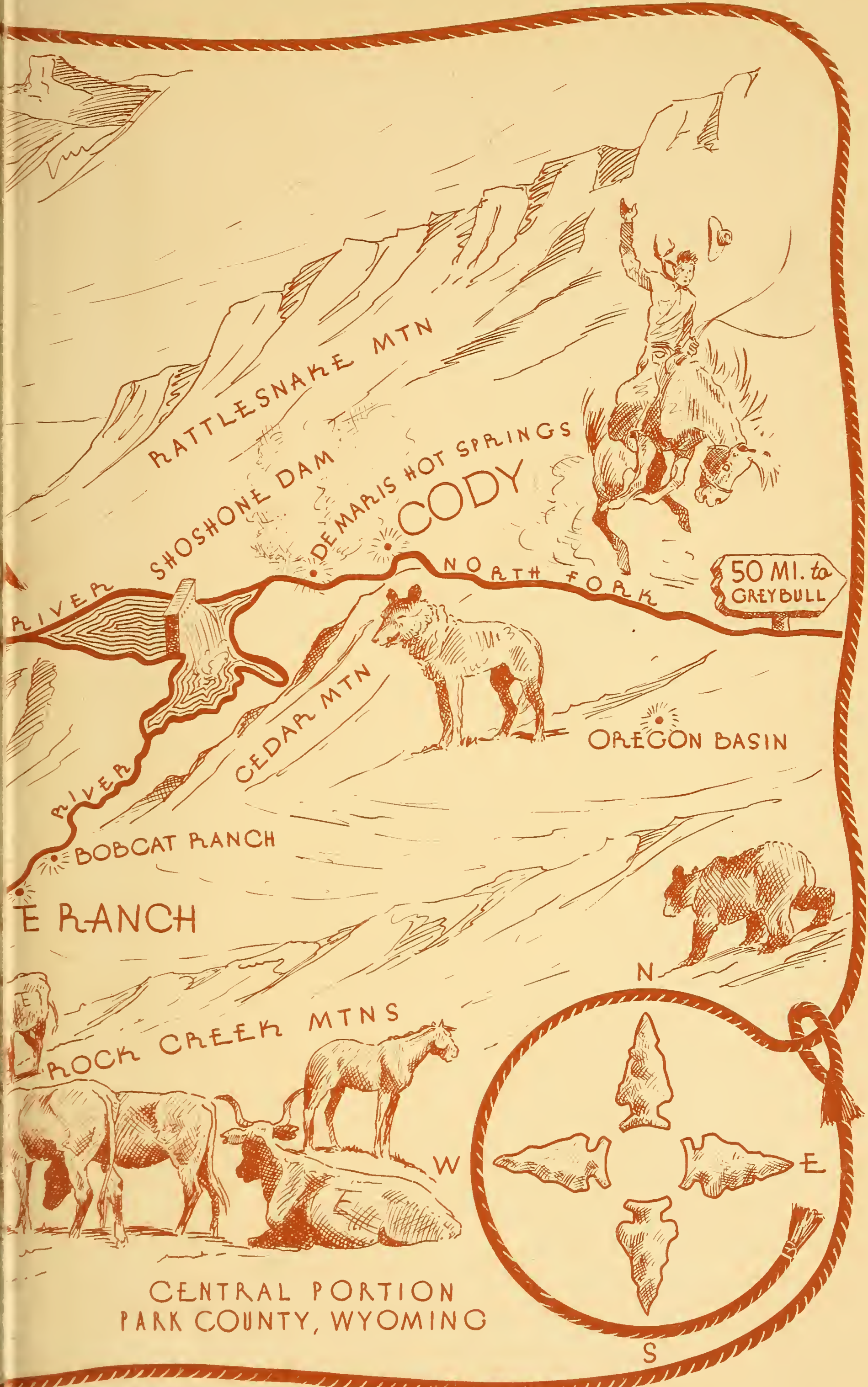
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CENTRAL PORTION
PARK COUNTY, WYOMING

My Life with Buffalo Bill

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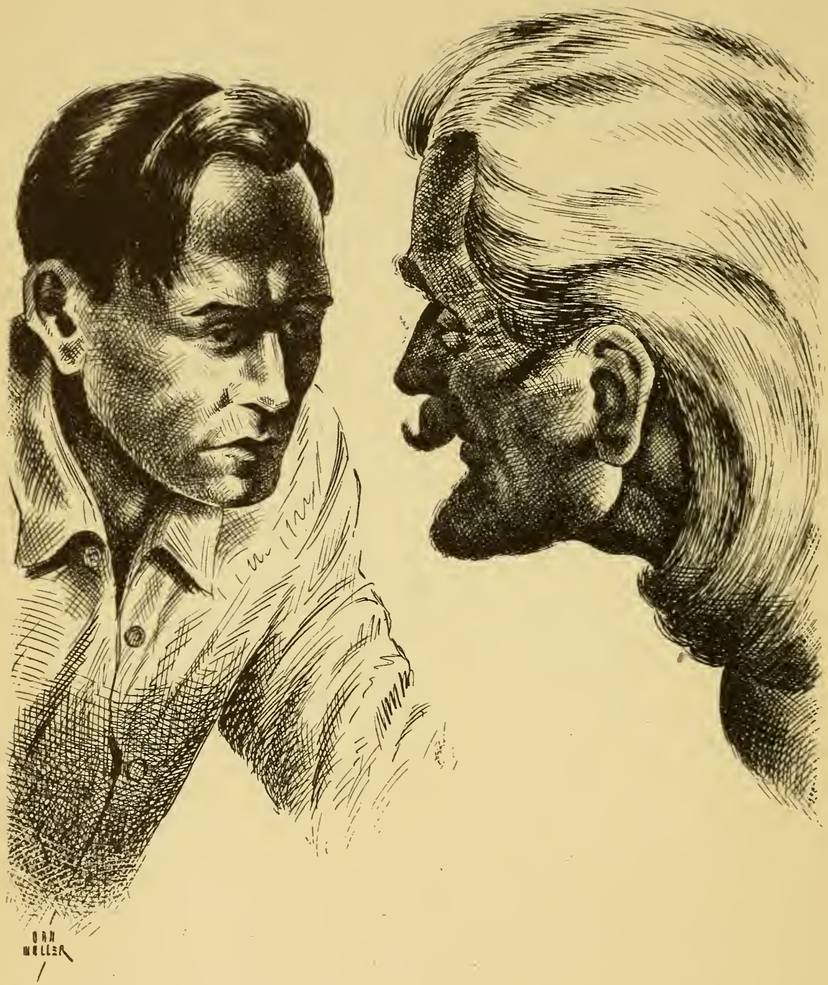
DAN MULLER

My Life with
BUFFALO BILL

By Dan Muller

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

Chicago
REILLY & LEE

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

IRENE AND OTTO GRATZOL

In dedicating this book to you
I do not mean so much to
compliment you . . .
as myself

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CHAPTER 1

A Last Look at the Cross-Up

WHEN the wagon creaked over the rise onto the flats Ma asked Mr. Sorenson to stop the team for a minute. She stood up and looked back, and then stepped onto the seat itself for a better look at what we were forever leaving behind. The Cross-Up ranch buildings—the one-window, L-shaped house, the barn, the corrals, the leaning little shack in back, the shed propped against the barn—were a picture in the sunlight, and I almost reached for the sheet of wrapping paper I had brought along to draw on during the journey.

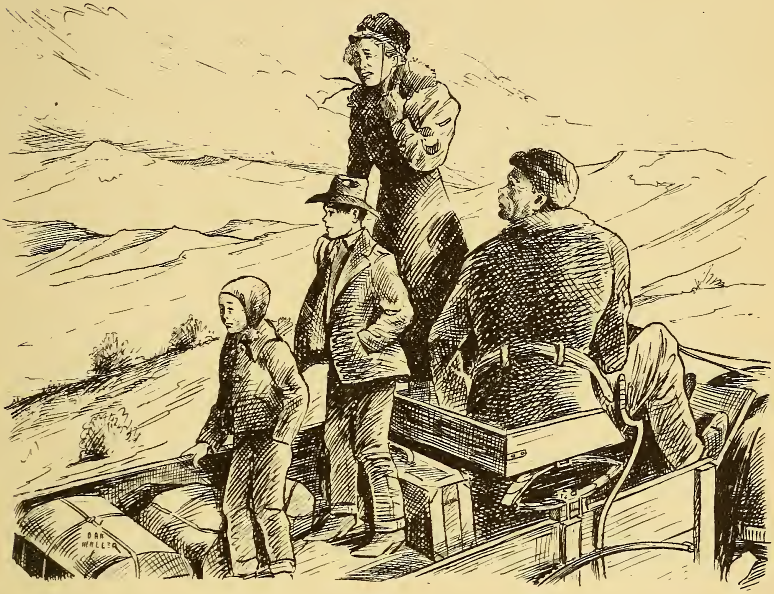
The horses stepped forward—perhaps to crop some weed beside the two-wheel trail—and Ma reached down to steady herself on my nine-year-old shoulder. As she stood there a cow in the corral set up a bellering that the others joined in. I thought: *They all belong to Mr. Sorenson now. I don't have to feed them, nor water them, nor help to tie them up so they can be milked—not anymore.* There was no comfort in the thought even though I often had regretted the time spent in doing those chores. Ma didn't say anything, but her eyes swung to the left where the great cottonwood rose above the graves of Pa and my twin brother, Carl, Jr., and Kate, my sister. Ma's blue eyes were moist and her grasp on my shoulder tightened fiercely.

I remembered too. But through my young mind there flashed a picture of Sabino, the young wolf cub that had been my pet, snarling at the Sorenson boys when they tried to make friends. I could see Otejo, my pony, pretending he didn't want to be caught in the loop of my lariat but placing himself inescapably near so that my nine-year-old throw wouldn't be short of its willing mark. I could picture the fine canters over the flats when Otejo ran freely between my knees, his joyous but only half-hearted efforts to unseat me, and the fine run he'd give me when we neared the cabin again.

My throat tightened with my thoughts. *I don't want to go to live with Colonel Cody even though he was Pa's good friend. I don't want Ma and Ben to go east without me.* In spite of the hardships, the terror of winter's cold and snow, the loss of stock to the blizzards' relentless furies, the hunger when food had run low—in spite of all these I didn't want to go. But Ben, my six-year-old brother, who sat on the soapbox in the back of the wagon with me, coughed hollowly, and I knew that poor Ma's decision was right. Another winter at the Cross-Up would kill Ben just as surely as it had killed Carl, Jr. and Kate, and Ma hadn't the money to keep both of us with her in the east. There was no other way. I sighed regretfully.

"I know, Dan," Ma said, "it's hard leavin' what we worked so hard to make. But it's best."

Mr. Sorenson, the only nester we had let ourselves get friendly with, reached up a rough hand. "Mrs. Muller, yust don' ban worry. Ay tak gud care of place. It be yust lak yu leave it ven yu come back, sure. Sure it vill."



Ma's blue eyes were moist and her grasp on my shoulder tightened fiercely.

Ma didn't move and for a moment I dreamed very, very really that I could see Pa ride hellbent and cussin' on good old Chuck. Tears flooded my eyes and I turned to bury my head against Ma's skirted knee. She gave me a hard pat of comfort and stepped down from the seat and said, "I know you'll take care of things, Mr. Sorenson. We just have trouble reelizin' we got to leave."

Determinedly she faced forward and sat down beside the nester. "Go on, Mr. Sorenson," she said.

My tears stopped and from my seat on the soapbox beside Ben I looked back at tall Mount Field, which never before had looked so blue and beautiful. The year-round snow on the distant Continental Divide lay unsullied white as I had always known it. Just before a dip in the tracks forever shut off my view of the Cross-Up buildings I drank it all deeply into my memory so that until this day, more than fifty years later, I can still see it as though it were right before my eyes. I have never been back.

Mr. Sorenson drove steadily and as fast as the trail and the horses' stamina would let him. We pulled into Choteau just as the sun was sending its last lingering traces out of the mountains to the west—a drooping, mournful red that seemed in tune with our low spirits.

We had never before made the trip into Choteau in one day's drive, so we were all tuckered out. Pa's old friend, John Miller, the liveryman, as always, let us sleep in the livery stable office. Perhaps, if Ma had let me, I would have meandered out into the wonders of the streets of the town again for I had been to town only two or three times in my life. But Ma was too wise for that and I soon slept. Once or twice during the night I woke to hear a horse stomp an iron shoe against the slivered boards of his stall.

Mr. Sorenson had bedded down in the wagon, covered deep with blankets against the fall night's chill. But he was up before any of us. Mr. Miller cooked our breakfast over the office stove and it was pleasant to breathe in the good aroma of coffee and frying bacon.

While the neighborly nester fed and harnessed the horses Ma took me by the hand and made a few small purchases at the early-open stores of Choteau. We had returned to the stable before Mr. Sorenson was ready to start.

We took off and before the last of the town's few buildings had jolted past our wheels I caught sight of the curiously shaped Bear Top Mountain to the west. We forded the Teton River again, for the last time.

Ma didn't say much, but when she spoke the nester would answer and with awkward conversation try to keep her thoughts from cantering back along her path of grief. Mr. Sorenson sure had a good heart. He's one nester I hope the gods are kind to.

Ma called back to us to look when we came in sight of the Sun River. Once we came alongside the stream we followed it the rest of the way into Great Falls.

If Choteau was a sight for me, Great Falls, with its many buildings and hundreds of people was a greater one. I gaped as only a boy who had always lived out on the range could gape at the strange new sights that met my eyes.

We ate in a restaurant that night, and Mr. Sorenson insisted over Ma's protests on paying the bill. He even encouraged Ben and me to eat pie. After we had finished, there still remained considerable time before our train would leave for Omaha where I would change for North Platte, Nebraska, Colonel Cody's town. Ma urged Mr. Sorenson to start on his long trip home.

"Ay vill feel batter ven yu are comfort'ble on train, Mrs. Muller," he said and stayed with us.

He made sure that Ma's trunk was safely checked and guarded my old green carpetbag and the leather suitcase that held the food we were to eat for part of the long journey, while Ma shopped in the stores for more food. I had never seen oranges before and she bought some. I didn't know what to do with the one she gave me and had to be told to peel it.

The station was dimly lighted but it was alive with people. There were Indians and cowfolk and townspeople, each with a group of his own breed. Buckboard horses and cowponies stood wearily but uncomplainingly at the hitchracks. The baggageman wheeled trunks and crates to where the baggage car's wide door would open, and among his loads I spied our old battered but securely roped trunk. The busy instrument in the telegrapher's office kept up a staccato clicking. Mr. Sorenson talked long and earnestly in his broken English, trying to bring to Ma's despairing heart some hope. "Yu yust vait, Mrs. Muller. Yu see. Ven yu get t' New York t'ings vill go nice for yu. Liddle Ben he vill be happy und healthy. Don' yu vorry about Dan. He be yust fine with Colonel Cody. He fine man. Everyvun know Buffalo Bill. He take good care of Dan, yu yust vait und see."

In the distance a hoarse, sharp whistle sounded, and men ran to hold their horses so they wouldn't break loose and run wild when the great engine should come jolting and smoking and roaring into the station. The crowd all tensed, for traintime was always an occasion in Montana in the 1890's. A long funnel of white light suddenly shot over the hill and the great locomotive slowed, chuff-chuffed itself slowly into the station, then stopped with an eerie whistling of escaping steam.

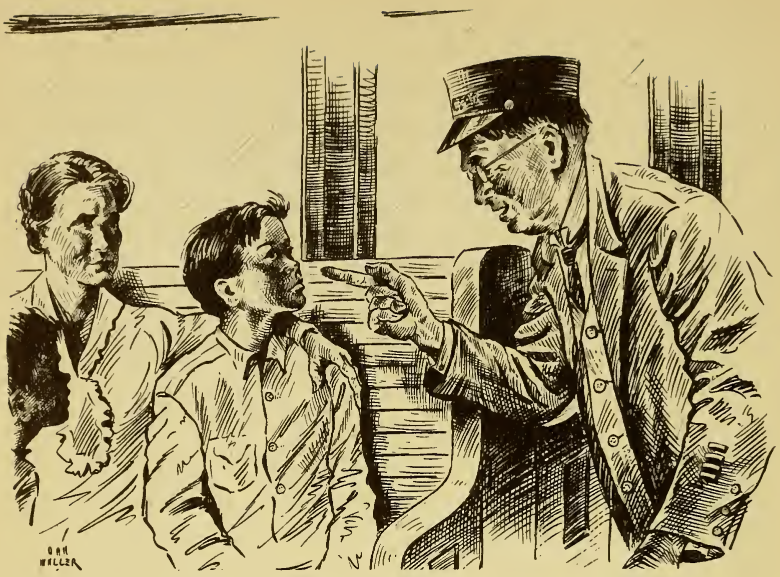
Mr. Sorenson helped us to get aboard with our baggage and then stood outside our window while the train waited to unload and load its freight. The last time I saw him was through the train window. His cap was off, his moustache drooped yellowly about the corners of his mouth, and there was an unmistakable moistness that ran down his right cheek close to his nose. I could barely hear what he shouted to Ma; "Yu be goodhearted, Mrs. Muller. Ever't'ing, it is gonna be all right. Yu see. Sure."

We had had a long day of it and were tired and drowsy. Ben was soon asleep, but I kept awake to view the strange sights of my first train ride. The coaches were dimly lighted with hanging oil lamps, and at the far end of the coach a round stove sometimes smoked when the car jolted over a roughness in the track. The train's whistle on the cold, thin night air was a shriek that came crisply and sharply. Ma dozed off too. She was not alone, however. A good many of the other passengers nodded, and from all portions of our car came snores in a half dozen different keys. But I was wide awake with the excitement of this new experience. Or so I thought.

I don't know how much later it was when the conductor's stentorian shout "T-I-C-K-E-T-S" woke me. He took Ma's tickets and tore off a part of them. "Is this cowboy going on by himself?" he asked with a gruff kindness that I liked.

Ma said, "Yes, mister. He goes to North Platte in Nebraska. Just Ben and I go to New York."

"Well, the young cowboy here changes at Omaha, then," he said. "We won't get into Omaha until late tomorrow afternoon, so there's no reason to get anxious. An' mam, if you want for anything, just you tell me."



"Is this cowboy going on by himself?" he asked.

I think Ma felt safer after he said that, for, after looking to make sure that Ben in the other seat was covered, she settled back in her corner of the seat, smiled softly at me, leaned her head against the window and slept. I felt suddenly alone. The fear of my new home, which I had been managing not to remember, flooded over me. But I soon slept.

The dawn shining in my window woke me and I got my first look at this new country. It was strangely flat. Here and there could be seen a lonely rider or wagon. The mountains were but a dim blue haze in the distance, and I wasn't even sure the haze was the mountains. The houses were different too. The clapboards' parallel lines were strange to me, and the houses were much larger than those of Great Falls or Choteau, the only towns I had seen up to that time. In the larger towns a man or boy would hop on the train and pass through the cars selling hot coffee in tin cups, sandwiches wrapped in paper, and nice doughnuts with powdered sugar on them. When a candy butcher came through Ma bought some candy on sticks for Ben and me. When mealtime came almost all of the people in our car would dig down into their satchels and bring out all kinds of things to eat. In the close air of the stove-heated coach the smell of food competed powerfully but unequally with the stronger scents of unwashed bodies.

The strange sights seen through the windows didn't hold Ben and me too long and, tired of sitting, we ran up and down the aisle. We discovered at the end of the car a miraculous way of getting water to drink. All we had to do was turn a handle and the water poured out just as if you were pouring out of a coffee pot.

Ma, anxious at the parting that would soon take me from her, called me back to the seat often. "Remember," she said once, "don't bolt your food. Say 'thank you' and 'yes'm' and 'nosir' when people speak to you. I want them to like you at Colonel Cody's. Remember, Dan, he's taking you to raise because he was an old friend of your father's in the Indian scouting days. And if you behave yourself like a nice, well-brought-up boy they'll like you and be glad they're helping you. But if you're bad, there's no telling what they'll do. So you be good, son."

"Yes, Ma," I said. "Sure." I was quite in earnest about it, even if I did want to get back to playing in the aisle. "I'll do everything they tell me, Ma."

The kindly conductor warned Ma just before we pulled into Omaha. The tag Colonel Cody had sent her, which gave directions for getting to North Platte and from there to his ranch, she hung on a cord around my neck. She got a towel out of her bag and wetted it at that strange contrivance at the end of the car and rubbed so hard on my face, neck, and ears it made them burn. She combed my hair and straightened out the wrinkles in my jacket. She didn't stop fussing over me until the conductor roared out, "OMAHA."

CHAPTER

2

Alone

THE train gradually slowed and the buildings became taller and more numerous. We passed large stockyards that had many pens, most of them filled with steers from range country. And then we pulled into a large station. There were hundreds of folks milling around.

Ma's train would lay over for a half an hour and mine left before hers, so she and Ben got off the cars with me. I proudly carried my carpetbag and there was, I remember, even though I was apprehensive, a wonderful feeling of being very responsible now that I was to go on alone. But Ma was sad, and I'm sure I saw traces of tears in her tired eyes.

She looked tuckered out, I thought suddenly. I hadn't noticed it before. She was haggard and tired, her face white. She stumbled once, and her hand tightened on young Ben's. I didn't want to leave her.

We walked into the station to make inquiries. The ceilings were high, and under them a continuous hubbub of talk hung hollowly. Ma put some change in my pocket and bought me the first pears I ever ate . . . seemed like there were many firsts in my life at this point. So many new things at once added to my fright.

Ma sensed that, I guess, for she pointed out a picture book displayed on the newspaper stand and, when I showed some interest in it, she again depleted her slender store of money by buying it.

Then she led the way to my train. In the coach she found an unoccupied seat. When she started to lift my green carpetbag to the rack a man stopped to put it up for her.

She held me tight against her and kissed me and cried, the tears, when I looked up, falling like a little shower onto my cheeks. My face screwed up then and I must have let out a sob, for all of a sudden Ma's tight grasp loosened and she patted my back and smiled through the still-falling tears. She found her handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes with it and I brushed the sleeve of my jacket across my face. "Dan boy," she said, "I wouldn't trust no ordinary nine-year-old boy to go on a train journey by himself. But you've been as good as a man since your Pa died and I know you'll be brave and strong and make out all right."

My tears stopped then too. I felt proud and strong —strong enough to lick the whole world if it should make one small motion of disagreement. My shoulders straightened. "We could go back to the Cross-Up, Ma!"

She patted me on the back. "No, Dan," she said gravely. "Now we're started we'll carry out our plans." She hugged me again.

A uniformed man called out for all visitors to leave. Ma released herself from my unwilling fingers. I kissed her. I even kissed Ben—I'd never done that before.

They stood outside my car window waiting for the train to move, every once in a while Ma would wave her fingers at me and her mouth would work as if she had a tooth that hurt her. I hurried to the steps at the end of the car. "Ma!" I cried. "You better get goin' unless you aim fer to miss your train!"

She ran to me and picked me off the steps and squeezed me. Then she put me back on the steps and half ran, Ben after her, down the platform. I crouched on the step and watched them go. At the end of the train Ma turned and waved her arm frantically once, and then grabbed Ben's waving hand out of the air and disappeared.

Tears crowded against my eyelids and I stumbled back to my seat under the green carpetbag. I looked around at the strange folks in the car. For the first time I realized fully how alone I was. *My Ma was gone!* My lids no longer could withstand the pressure of my tears.

A kindly lady came over to me and put her arms around me. Other passengers gathered. The train jerked under us. I pulled away from the lady and tried to get a last glimpse of Ma through the window. But she wasn't in sight. And the tears came again.

The lady hugged me very close and said soothing things like, "There, there, little man, you'll see your Ma again. Just don't you cry anymore." Folks insisted on giving me things to eat, and I held them in my hands and looked at them without desire through the tears that seemed to have no end. Yet pretty soon they did stop. I avoided the eyes of the people, ashamed of my babyishness. But the lady didn't think badly of me. She patted me on the back and said, "There, that's the boy. You'll be all right now." Every time the train butcher came through the car people would buy something for me. Never before in my life had I had so much candy and coffee and cookies and things.

We left Omaha far behind and I looked at the pictures in the book Ma had bought me. They made me want to try to draw them. I stood up on the seat and pulled the wrapping paper and some pencils out of the green carpetbag. I used the picture book as a model for a few drawings. But I wasn't satisfied with what I did. There was something in my fingers that twitched at the pencil as I held it. I let it make its own lines, and pretty soon it was Otejo I was drawing. Otejo with me on him and Ma standing away a little. I drew the doorway of the Cross-Up around her, and then the leanto shed against the barn with the tongue of the wagon leaning out against the ground and the corral bars.

"Land sakes!" said the lady who had been nice to me. "You draw real good! What is that there picture?"

"That's the Cross-Up, our ranch," I told her. "An' that's me on my pony, Otejo, an' Ma in the doorway, an' the leanto an' the barn, an' stickin' out back are the corral bars."

She took the drawing in her hands. "You draw awful good," she said. She continued to look at it. "That looks like a real nice place," she said, kind of wistful like. "Real homey."

I was grateful. I said, "It is a good ranch. Only after

Pa got killed by the hoss it was too much fer Ma and me to take care of. We tried fer three years but I wasn't big enough."

"I'll jus' bet you was as good as any man," she said comfortingly. I looked at her blue eyes and smiled and she laughed aloud. "Well, almost as good," she added. "Jus' give you 'nother four or five years and you will be, too!"

"Thank you, mam," I said.

"Where was this ranch?"

"The Cross-Up? Way up in Montana close to the Teton River and not far from the Continental Divide. There's mountains, an' canyons, an' nesters, an' everythin' up there."

Her face grew bleak with some remembered anguish. "An' winters too I 'spect?"

"Yes'm," I allowed. "Lots o' snow an' blizzards."

"Tell me now," she said, "did you ever run out o' wood in a blizzard?"

"Yes'm," I answered. "We did last winter when Ma was sick. I was doin' all the chores, carryin' out the chamber to empty it, an' feedin' the chickens—until the blizzard an' the wolves got 'em. It lasted a long while an' drifts piled up so deep outside it buried the ropes we strung to guide us to the barn an' the chickenhouse an' the backhouse. We used all the wood an' Ma had me chop up the bureau an' the benches, an' at last the table. But then the blizzard stopped and Ma got better an' we was able t'get some more from the wood pile. But we had to eat settin' on the floor, 'cause we'd burned the table an' benches."

The lady's hand had dropped on my shoulder and tightened there. "I know," she said, her blue eyes wide with memory. "I know, boy. We had it like that too!"

"We was all right," I told her, "when ol' Hossface came t'see how we was doin'. He dragged in a lotta wood at the end of his rope and chopped it up fer us. He saw that we got on all right."

"Hossface?" she said. "Is that a name now?"

"That's what we called him," I explained. "He was my Pa's pardner. He chased away the nesters on our land."

The lady tightened up all of a sudden.

"Nesters did you say? An' tell me, what are nesters?"

"They're the pesky coyotes," I told her, "that come on your land an' build houses and put up fences so that in a blizzard the stock drift up against 'em and freeze t'death."

"Are they now? An' you had nesters?"

"Yeah. My Ma warned 'em away. She told 'em it was our land an' that they had t'vamoose. But they jus' laughed because Ma was only a woman. When Hossface come back Ma told him an' he rode up and tol' the nesters they had t'leave. But they laughed again. They oughta known better'n t'laugh at Hossface. He was real nice to 'em. He didn't get right out'n'out mad. He tol' 'em they had t'go an' tol' 'em if they hadn't left by the next day he'd sling some lead their way."

"An' so then they left?"

"No'm, they didn't. That's when Hossface—after one of 'em tried t'pull a gun on him—shot one of 'em. Then they left pronto, yuh betcha."

"Yes," she said. "That's what happened to my husband."

"He shot a nester?"

"No. He was shot by a cowman."

I was silent for a moment. "That's too bad," I said. "Some nesters're tol'able, like Mr. Sorenson. He's our neighbor at the Cross-Up. He's a good nester."

The lady didn't say anything for a time. I guess she was thinking of her husband who was drilled. Then she said, "Tell me about your ma and pa, boy."

"Ma," I said, "her folks was German, but she came over when she was a small girl. Pa was a top hand. He was quarter blood Injun. He was a scout fer the army with Buffalo Bill, but he wasn't no enemy of his blood brothers. He helped them out—warned them when they was in danger, an' tol' 'em they hadn't oughta go on the warpath. Buffalo Bill did that too, yuh bet. The Indians think a heap of Pahaska."

"Pahaska?" she questioned.

"Buffalo Bill," I told her. "Pahaska is Sioux fer 'Long Hair.' "

"An' your Pa was quarter-blood Indian?"

"Yes'm. Why when Christmas time came the Piegan Blackfoot chief, Black Hoss, always sent two of his warriors, Three Suns and Arrow Top, to us with presents. When Pa was alive we give 'em back presents. But after Pa was killed we couldn't do that no more 'cause we didn't have 'nough for ourselves. But Black Hoss would send us presents just the same."

"That was mighty nice," the lady said. "I ain't never had no truck with Indians, but if you was related to 'em I suppose they could be all right."

"Yes'm, they sure could."

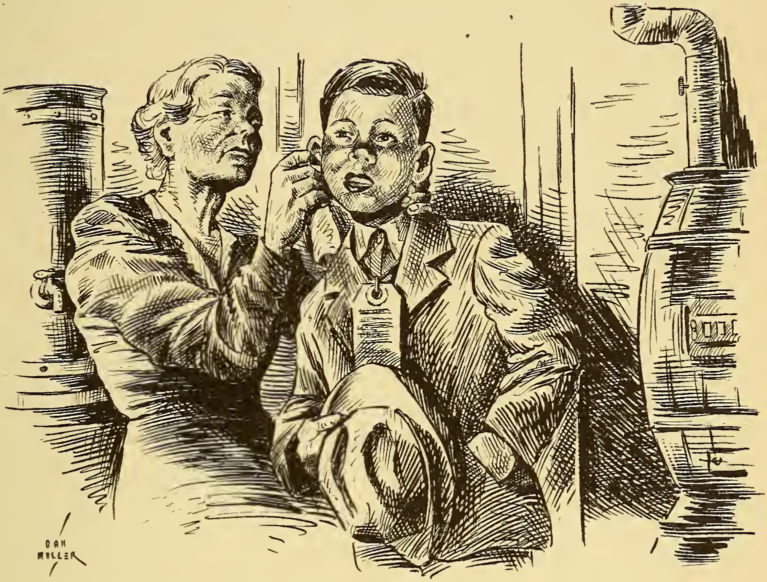
"Tell me how your Pa was killed."

"It was on Christmas when I was comin' six. Hossface was expected fer Christmas dinner and Ma had been bakin' and roastin' fer three days. After breakfast

Pa went out t'the corral t'take a bit of the rough off'n a salty bronc he was feedin' fer no good reason. Ma didn't want him to go 'cause he had a little to drink an' the hoss was bad. There was ice patches under the snow, too. After he went out there we heard him cussin' at the bronc, but we didn't pay no attention. Pretty soon Hossface come an' Ma asked him to go out an' get her 'no-good Injun' 'cause dinner was ready. Hossface came back with his face longer'n I ever seen it. 'Missy,' he says, 'they's been a accident in the hoss corral.' It was Pa. The bronc had slipped an' rolled on Pa an' then got up an' kicked him in the head. Pa was dead."

We didn't say much for a while, and pretty soon I drew some more pictures for the kind lady and she thought they were nice too. So I gave them to her. I didn't feel like crying anymore. I went down to the end of the car and this one also had water you could get by just turning a handle. I guess I let more water run out of that thing than I drank. But no one objected. I joshed with a couple of cowboys, and they could see pretty quick I wasn't any tenderfoot but knew what I was talking about. I told them about meeting Charley Russell back in Choteau a while back and how I had drawn a picture for him and he had drawn one for me. They wouldn't believe me until I got it out of the green carpetbag to show them. Then they believed all right. Charley Russell sure knew how to draw a cowboy and his pony so real you'd think you could reach right out and touch them!

The conductor came up and told me when we were getting near to North Platte, and remembering what Ma had done when we were pulling into Omaha I went down to the water thing and wetted my handkerchief and scrubbed it over my face and hands. The kind lady saw me working at it and she came and gave me a hand. She was mighty nice. At the time I'm sure I didn't believe she could be a nester's wife. Not unless he was a good nester like Mr. Sorenson.



The kind lady saw me working on it and she came and gave me a hand.

When the train began to slow down one of the cowboys who was getting off too pulled down my carpetbag and carried it up to the end of the car. The conductor told him to take me to the station man and he'd take care of me.

North Platte wasn't as big as Omaha, but it was bigger than Choteau, and I guess heaps bigger than Great Falls too. The cowpoke didn't need to take me inside the station. The station man was outside there waiting for me. He said he'd been expecting me so I guess Colonel Cody had sent word about me coming.

"So your goin' t'visit my friend Bill Cody, sonny?"

I answered like Ma had told me. "Yessir." I looked up into his rough, weather-red face. "I'm goin' t'live at his ranch, Scout's Rest. Is it a big ranch, mister?"

"The finest ranch in these yere parts, son. Come in where it's warm an' I'll see to it that yuh get t'the ranch after a bit, yuh betcha."

He had a coffeepot going on a little iron heating stove. He fried us some ham and eggs and made some fresh coffee and we sat down and ate. He asked me a lot of questions about who was I, where did I come from, and such things. He told me Mr. Cody wasn't at the ranch right now but that Mrs. Cody and their daughter Irma was. "Irma's only there a part o' the time, though," he told me. "Most of the time she's off t'school. Mrs. Cody, now, she's a mighty nice woman. Yuh'll like her, sonny. She'll be mighty good to yuh, I know. When my relief comes around we'll go rent us a rig and take yuh out t'the ranch."

Not long after we washed the dishes the station man's relief came along, and we went over to the livery stable. The station man wouldn't let me carry my carpetbag. The ranch—it was really a big farm—was a ways out from North Platte, and it didn't take us long to get there. That station man could sure drive—the way he handled the ribbons made me think that he could have made a mighty fine stage driver.

The Cody place was sure a dandy. The large sprawling house and huge barns and corrals were different from any I had ever seen. No chinked logs. No pole corrals or pole gates. And the barns were solid big structures that stood straight in their places and had good fresh paint on them. Alongside them were silos to hold the winter forage.

We didn't need to rap on the door. A woman a lot bigger than my Ma came out on the porch as we drove up. "Hello there, Mr. Standish," she greeted the station man. "Is that Danny Muller you have there?"

"It sure is, mam," the station man said; "an' he 'pears t'be a mighty nice youngun'."

"Will has told me some fine stories about his Pa," Mrs. Cody said. "If he's like his Pa he's bounden to be nice."

I was kind of shy and sort of backed away when she bent down toward me and said, "Come here and say hello, Danny."

For a moment I forgot what Ma had told me about manners. "I ain't no baby," I told her. "My name's Dan."

A warm, understanding smile spread across her fleshy face. "Of course you aren't!" she said heartily. "You must forgive me, Dan. Will and I had a little boy once. But he died when he was very small and I guess I always think of boys as little and call them by baby names. But I won't you. I'll call you Dan."

She opened her arms and I walked slowly toward her. She didn't grab me. She put her hands on my shoulders and looked down at me with her brown eyes, her lips a little apart so I could see her nice white teeth. "I'm glad you're here, Dan," she said, and I didn't feel any need to strain away when her arms went around me. She hugged me gently—then gave me a right smart bear hug.

It felt good. Almost like it was Ma.

CHAPTER 3

Scout's Rest

THE ranchhouse sure was big. Along the wall wasn't just one window, but many. There were lots of doors, too. The room Mrs. Cody took me in first could have held the Cross-Up's barn and still had space left. It seemed to stretch away like the fields outside. At one end a stone fireplace spread over most of one wall, and there was a kind of shelf above it on which were arranged pictures in oval frames. Mrs. Cody told me who they were.

"This one, Dan," she said, pointing to a tall man whose hair fell below his wide-brimmed Stetson and who wore a moustache and a small beard, "this one is Will, my husband."

"Buffalo Bill?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, and a troubled light came into her eyes and the lines about her mouth deepened with a sorrow that I then didn't understand. "You call him Uncle Bill. He is handsome, isn't he? And in some ways he's a fine man. He'll be home in a few days. He's traveling with the Show — Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, you know. You've probably heard of it. You'll love it when you see it — trick riding and shooting, with lots of cowboys and Indians. People all over the United States love to see it. When it played in Europe even the kings and queens liked it. I guess I'm the only one that doesn't, because it keeps your Uncle Bill away from home so much. He goes out with it in early spring, and they play all summer."

"It sounds exciting," I said.

She picked up another picture. "This was Kit — Kit Carson Cody." Her face became sad. "He was our only boy. Will loved him very dearly. But he died when he was even younger than you are now. Maybe —" and her eyes upon me were warm with hope, "Maybe you can be a son to Will."

I was uncomfortable under her gaze and scuffed a foot into the carpet. She pointed to a picture of a little girl. "This was our daughter Orra. She died only four years after Kit." Tears filled Mrs. Cody's eyes but didn't drop. She saw my concern and smiled at me. "That's the end of the bad news, Dan. This next one is Arta. She's grown up now and lives in Minneapolis. And this one is Irma." She beamed fondly down at the picture of a plump young lady. "She's away at school most of the time. But she's here now and you'll see her. She's driving with a young man, but she'll be back for supper."

"And that's you," I said.

She smiled down at me. It sure made me feel good to have her look at me that way — as if she was glad I was to live with them. "Yes," she said. "I want you to call me Aunt Louisa, Dan. We want you to think of Scout's Rest as your home and us as your folks."

"Yes'm," I said, feeling, I remember, shy.

She didn't say anything for a minute, and I was kind of uncomfortable. "I bet I know what you'd like, a piece of bread and jelly." I looked up at her. "Well," she said sharply, "don't just stand there. I'm not going to feed any boy bread and jelly in my parlor!"

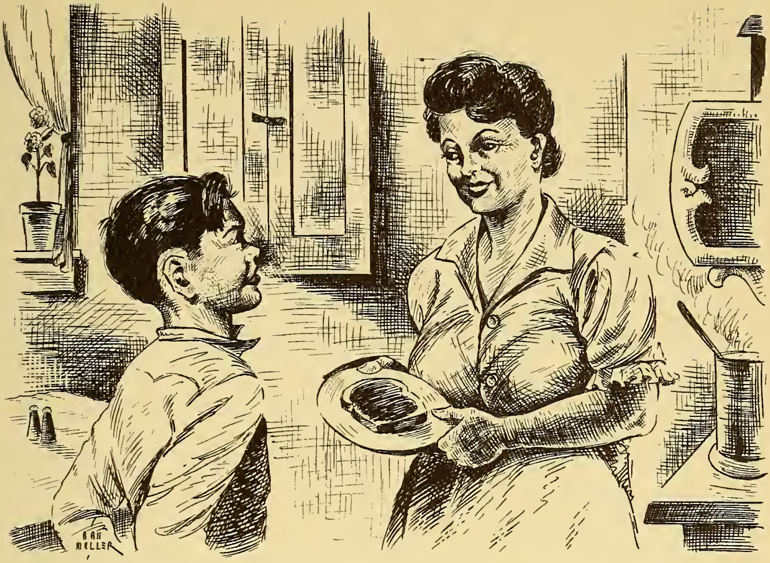
"No'm," I said solemnly and then grinned.

Her lower chin wobbled with laughter. "Come," she said. "You can eat in the kitchen."

I followed her out into a great big kitchen. It had red and white curtains at the four windows. A big cook stove with a warming oven on a shelf at the back was close to a sink with a hand pump. On the other side of the stove was a white-painted kitchen cupboard. The wide boards of the floor were white from much scrubbing. Squarely in the center of the room was a table covered with a red and white cloth. Over by a window a rocking chair, white antimacassar over the back, had a wicker sewing basket beside it on the floor. Aunt Louisa pulled a chair out from the table.

"There," she said, "you can sit down there after you get through looking around and I'll get your bread and jelly ready."

She went over to the cupboard and from a tin box on its top took a loaf of bread and cut a big slice. She opened one of the cupboard's doors and brought down a dish of butter and spread it thick over the bread, and then took out a jar of jelly that she spread on liberally.



She put it on a plate and turned. "You ready?" she asked me.

She put it on a plate and turned. "You ready?" she asked me.

"Yes'm," I said eagerly and hurried to sit down in the chair. Aunt Louisa went away and I took a big bite. In a moment she was back with a glass of milk.

"Think that'll do you?"

I gurgled something out past that heavenly tasting bread and jelly and she laughed.

She sat down in a chair across the table and without saying anything watched me eat. When I'd finished she asked, "Want some more?"

I put down the empty glass and sighed regretfully. "No'm."

Then I remembered what Ma had told me. "No, thank you, Aunt Louisa."

She nodded appreciation of my courtesy.

"All right, then. Go over to the sink and wash away what's sticking to your face. Then I'll show you your room."

I worked the handle and the water came out of the pump right away. I washed real good and then dried on the big roller towel that hung by the sink. I even remembered to wipe off with the towel the jelly that I had got on the pump handle.

We went back into the parlor and Aunt Louisa then led the way down a big hall. About the fourth door down she stopped and opened the door. "This is your room, Dan."

It was bigger than the whole Cross-Up ranchhouse. It had two windows, with white curtains hanging trimly before them. There was a table against the wall between the windows and I thought *I can draw here.* A double bed was in a corner and it had on a nice spread. Next to this was a low dresser that had a mirror rising above it. The mirror hung so high that I couldn't see into it and Aunt Louisa noticed that.

"If you want to admire yourself, Dan," she told me, "you just climb up on a chair and look at yourself all you want to."

"Yes'm," I answered. "Is this room all mine?"

"Yes, Dan," she said.

Next to the dresser was a washstand with a big white bowl and pitcher.

Aunt Louisa said, "I guess you can come to the kitchen to wash yourself. But if you want to lug water in here you can use it if you want to."

"I'll wash in the kitchen," I said.

"Probably no oftener than I make you," she smiled. She pointed to the white pot under the bed. "And I don't expect a big boy like you to use the chamber unless he's sick."

"No, mam, I sure won't."

"It's time I was getting supper," Aunt Louisa said. "You bring your carpetbag in here and unpack it. Then you just look around and get acquainted. Roam around the place all you want to."

"Yes'm," I said. "I sure will. An' thank you, Aunt Louisa."

She smiled and bent down. "You're welcome, Dan," she said and kissed me.

After I unpacked my carpetbag I went back to the parlor and looked again at the picture of Uncle Bill. I remember I thought he looked awfully nice and jolly, and somehow, in spite of the ache in my heart for Ma, I was glad I was there.

On the wall above the fireplace a couple of buffalo guns were fastened. An Indian tom-tom was hanging on another wall, and close to these were two Indian war bonnets. They sure looked nice. Two of the chairs didn't have just ordinary wooden legs and arm rests. Instead the legs and arms were buffalo horns. I felt of them and they were smooth and cool to touch.

I went outside to have a look-see at the barns and things. In a shed quite a bit smaller than the barns I found two shiny carriages, a fringed-top carryall, and two buckboards. I tried out the cushions in the carriages and found them slippery. I came out of the carriage house just as a horse and buggy drove up to the door with a flourish.

A young lady jumped out with a burst of laughter and turned back to the young man holding the reins. He leaned forward eagerly. "I tell you, Charley Kennedy," she said, "I'm going to that dance. But not with you. Harry Peyster asked me more'n a week ago. But I'll save you a dance."

With that she turned away from the crestfallen young man and in spite of her chubbiness ran lightly toward the door where I had stopped to look.

"Oh, *you're* here!" she said.

"Yes'm," I answered. She was pretty.

She reached down and took one of my hands. "You're Dan? I'm Irma. Come with me. I've got something mighty good to give you."

We went into the house, leaving the discomfited young man still clasping his reins. Irma took me down the hall to the second door. She opened it on to the prettiest room I ever saw. It was all frilly with curtains and lace and chairs with things hanging from them.

Irma picked up a prettily painted box from the jumble of bottles, brushes, and combs on the dresser top. "Here," she said. "This is yours. That young man will be bringing me another tomorrow and you can have part of that too. Now get out of here so I can change my dress."

I didn't open the box until I was in my own room. Then I pulled off the fancy lid and found it half full of chocolate creams.

Gosh!

Aunt Louisa, Irma, and I had supper in the kitchen. It was dark outside and the oil lamp in a bracket by the stove and the bigger one in the center of the table spread a pleasant yellow light over the room, and cast the rocking chair's shadow against the curtain at the window.

Irma helped with the dishes and I kind of puttered around without doing anything. Pretty soon there came a knock at the front door, and Irma hurried into the parlor to greet her young man.

Aunt Louisa wrung out the dishrag, shook it out, and wiped the dishpan with it. "Well, Dan," she said, "I think it's about time boys were going to bed — 'specially when they've just had a long journey. You come here to the sink and wash up. Then you hit the hay."

"Yes'm," I said. I wouldn't have objected even if I hadn't been so new around there. I was tired.

Aunt Louisa lighted a small lamp then and led the way to my bedroom. She put the light on the dresser and pulled the spread to the foot of the bed and opened the covers. She paused at the door. "Before you blow out the light remember to turn the wick down first so's you don't smoke up the chimney."

"Yes'm," I said.

"Goodnight, Dan."

"Goodnight, Aunt Louisa."

I was awful tired, and when I climbed into bed I thought I'd sleep before my eyes could close. But I didn't. And pretty soon I opened my eyes and stared up at a patch of light on the ceiling that came into the room from the parlor. It was sure different here. Everything was so nice that it just about met my idea of heaven. But it wasn't the Cross-Up. I was at home at the Cross-Up. I knew things, what to do — everything was familiar, a part of myself. And Ma was there! . . . Then I remembered she wasn't. That at this very moment she and Ben were speeding farther and farther away from me toward New York. I wanted Ma. There was an ache in my belly and a lump in my throat that wouldn't leave no matter how hard I swallowed. Seemed like I couldn't even breathe without Ma. The tears came and poured down my cheeks and — the next thing I knew it was morning.

When I woke the sun was shining through a window onto my clothes hung over a chair. I thought *I ought to feel bad.* But I didn't. Somehow I already had the feeling that this big room was mine. It was still early, and after I'd dressed I wandered out of the house. They were working in the barn and I knew if I met the men there they'd ask me a lot of questions, so I sauntered idly around just looking, verifying what I had seen late yesterday afternoon and making note of the new things.

When a bell clanged loudly I went back to the house and Aunt Louisa had breakfast ready. "I was wondering where you'd gone," she said. "You're an early riser, young man."

"Yes'm," I answered. "We always got up early on the Cross-Up."

After breakfast Aunt Louisa said, "Your Uncle Will will be here soon." She picked up two of the plates, one after the other. Then she put them down, and looked right at me. "You'll think he's wonderful, Dan. Almost everyone does. But he isn't perfect. You mustn't set out to be just like him." She picked up the plates again. "He'll have ideas on what he wants you to do. Until he comes you just get acquainted with the folks on the ranch and things."

So I wandered out again. I climbed up in the lofty haymows. They were chuck full and it was nice to walk over the top of the hay, sinking almost to my hips at every step. I climbed up the iron rungs of the ladderway on the side of one of the silos. Up on top I was as high as the windmill turning slowly in an idle breeze. From there I could see a long way, but there were no mountains — just level land stretching away as far as the eye could reach. I noticed a spot that was greener than anything else in sight. It wasn't very far away so I decided to climb down and walk over to it.

It was a swamp, but not a very watery one. Little grassy hummocks stippled it, and these I used as footing as I advanced into the middle. It wasn't very big. But near the center it was a little lower. And this low place had been used as a dump. There were some old bed springs, and some worn out pots, an old teakettle, a copper washboiler, some worn out, age-checked leather harness, and some bottles.

I looked at several of the things, but they weren't any good. I picked up one of the bottles. I couldn't read — there'd been no school near the Cross-Up — but I could smell, and I wrinkled my nose in distaste. The bottles smelled just like the big jugs old Mr. Satterfield had brought to Pa and Hossface, that they'd so carefully hid in the barn behind a loose board at the back of a pile of old horse blankets.

There were a lot of these bottles. Someone had been doing an awful lot of drinking. I threw the bottle as far as I could and it landed smack on top of another and both smashed. It sounded good so I broke some more — a lot of them.

I went back to the barnyard. I was willing now to meet the men if they were still around. A couple of them were and they nodded to me. One of them was the boss, I guess, because he was telling the other what he wanted done. This second one was a curious looking man. He limped when he walked. From up near the corner of his left eye a scar ran clear down to his jawbone, and his mouth on that side was pulled down as though there wasn't enough flesh to let it act natural.

The bossman said, "Oh, yuh're the boy, huh?"

"Yes'r," I said. "I'm Dan Muller."

"Howdy," he said. "I'm Jim Knox, the foreman. This is Slash Stacey."

The man with the scar said "Howdy," and I said "Howdy," too.

"What do you think of Scout's Rest?" asked the foreman.

"It's nice," I said.

"Well, it ain't very excitin'," said Mr. Knox, "now. But you wait until Colonel Cody gets here. Then things'll start to pop."

Slash Stacey grinned. "Sure 'nuff," he said. "There'll be drinkin', an' partyin', an' people all bent on havin' a good time. Old Scout's Rest'll come to life then for sure. Why . . ." a faraway look came into his eyes and his hands idled with the strap of harness in his hand, "when the Colonel's here, it always reminds me of the excitin' days when Alf Slade was a station agent fer the Pony Express." He paused and the faraway light in his eyes became a definite memory. "Why, I remember the day Alf Slade — —"

Mr. Knox grunted and said quickly, "Well, now, Slash, you know what I want. I gotta take care o' things in the barn," and he took a hurried departure, as though he didn't want to listen to what Slash had to say. But Slash was undisturbed.

"Be you a city boy?"

"Nos'r," I said. "I was born on the Cross-Up. I ain't no tenderfoot."

"G'wan boy. I s'pose yuh kin ride a bronc an' rope a steer an' brand a calf?"

"I sure can," I said confidently. And I could too.

"Well now," he said, "that'll make it easier for us. We won't need t' learn yuh nothin'."

"I don't know everythin'," I said, aware of the joshing in his tone. "I ain't full grown yet."

"Well, mebbe we kin put yuh onto the right way t'do things . . . But I was atalkin' o' Alf Slade. You ever hear o' him?"

"The bad man? My Pa told me."

"But you ain't never seen him?"

I admitted I hadn't.

"Course yuh ain't — he's been dead more'n thirty years!"

Slash kept on rubbing the piece of harness strap in his hand with the bit of oily rag in the other. "I seen Alf Slade in the flesh," he said after a moment, the careless tone filled with deep pride. "An' that's somethin' to brag about, son."

"Did yuh ever see 'im kill a man?" I asked eagerly.

"I sure did. He wa'n't no man t'fool 'round. He'd as soon shoot yuh as take a drink. Druther, I guess. Had more'n twenty-six notches to his credit. Why I 'member I was at Rocky Ridge when Slade spotted a gent that had done him some dirt a while back. 'Gents,' orates Slade, 'it's a good twenty yard shot f'm here,' and he pulls out his gun. 'Watch me. I'll clip the third button on that varmint's coat.' Well, son, he did, just like he said he'd do. The gent's funeral was the next day, yuh betcha."

Slash unconcernedly went on rubbing at his bit of harness. "He sure was ornery," I said. "My Pa always said it wasn't ever safe to be around him."

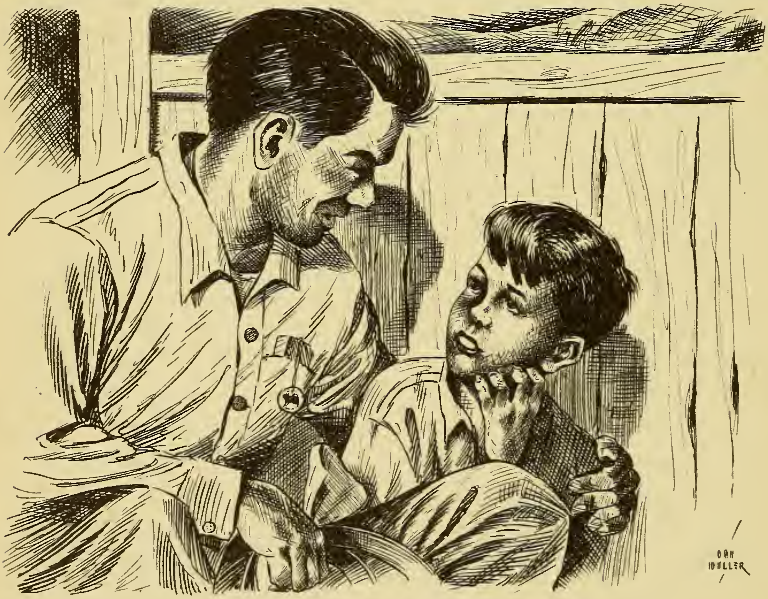
"It sure wa'n't," Slash said. He repeated pridefully, "I knew him in the flesh an' I tell yuh so. Why, he was damn' near as good a shot as Colonel Cody himself."

"Colonel Cody is a good shot?" I asked.

"Why, son, he's the best damn' shot in the whole wide world! Kin the Colonel shoot, he asks!"

I was abashed. "I remember now," I told him. "My Pa told me he could shoot." Slash paid me no attention. "He told me he could shoot real good," I added, trying to get back into the good graces of this story-telling man.

Slash muttered. "Kin the Colonel shoot! Kin a fish swim? Kin a bird fly? Kin yuh eat when yuh're hongry?



Slash muttered. "Kin the Colonel shoot! Kin a fish swim? Kin a bird fly?"

Why, son, the Colonel kin shoot so good they ain't no man in forty years been willin' t'make a shootin' bet with him. Not when he's sober, that is. You wait. He'll be home in a few days an' yuh'll see 'im shoot!"

"I'd sure like to," I said.

"Yuh jus' wait. The Colonel can't only shoot, but he's the best damn' man 'at ever forked a hoss. 'Course he's got his faults—as his wife could tell yuh. But yuh're a mighty lucky boy t'come t'live with Colonel Cody."

Slash gathered up his harness and went back into the barn. I wandered on to further discoveries.

CHAPTER
4

Uncle Bill Arrives

THOSE next three weeks before Uncle Bill arrived home from his summer with his Wild West show held neither crowded nor empty days. I didn't have anything special to do, yet at Scout's Rest there were always new things to do, like climbing to the top of the windmill, or onto the back of the big wooden horse in the harness shed, or pumping the bellows in the blacksmith shop.

The men were pretty nice to me, on the whole, but the one I liked best was Slash Stacey. He knew a lot of stories about Alf Slade, and he needed only a little persuasion to tell one. Mr. Knox didn't like that too well. Once he came into the barn while Slash was telling me about Slade, and he frowned and asked Slash gruffly if he'd finished cleaning the barns. Slash hadn't and he went right away to do it, so I didn't hear the rest of that story then.

I liked to hang around the horses in the barn, four of them as good as any horse I've ever seen. Slash pointed to one of them, a brown gelding that stood well over fifteen hands. "That's Brown Jug, the Colonel's favorite hoss," he said. "He don't let no one else ride 'im."

I didn't see much of Irma. Seemed like she was either out with a young man or one was hanging around her in the parlor. But Aunt Louisa was always there. We got on fine. She'd always ask me if I wanted some bread and jelly, or a doughnut, or something to eat, and most the time I did. It seemed to please her. She'd sit across the table from me while I ate. Sometimes she'd just look at me kind of solemn-like, and other times she'd talk in low, kind of sad tones.

"I don't see much of Will," she said one day, not looking at me but out through the curtains at the whitewashed cottonwoods beside the carriage house. "He's here in the wintertime a good deal. But there's always a lot of men with him, and they're busy talking, shooting, telling stories, and drinking."

I gulped down a big mouthful and looked up at her. "He sure must be pop'lar, Aunt Lou."

Her eyes snapped to my face as if something that had held them away had been cut loose. Her mouth, which had been kind of drawn down at the corners, straightened, and she smiled a little.

"Sometimes I think he's just too darn' popular, Dan." She got to her feet. "Now finish your snack and bring in my washline for me."

All the while the help talked about Uncle Bill coming home. They'd say something I wouldn't understand and then they'd clap a hand hard against a thigh and roar with laughter.

It didn't mean anything to me, no matter how much I puzzled over it, so I just gave up thinking about what they were saying. I didn't see too much of the help anyhow. Seem's how Aunt Lou didn't take too much to my hanging around with them, and she'd call me into the house to do something for her. The help ate at the Knox's house down below the little barn.

But there was no mistaking the day that Uncle Bill was to come. Everybody was excited, rushing to smarten something up, then off to something else, often without finishing hardly anything.

At noon when Irma, Aunt Lou, and I were eating dinner in the kitchen, we heard a loud yelling out in the yard. Irma and I ran into the parlor and out onto the porch. Down the road just a little piece there came a two-seater carriage, with a team just a-blazing away in the harness, a big cloud of dust around their knees and rolling back onto the carriage and the road.

One of the men rose to his feet in the jolting carriage and waved a hand and yelled at the help, clustered around the gateposts.

"It's Pa!" Irma screamed and ran as fast as she could down to the gateposts. I ran after her. We got there just as the carriage pulled to a stop. The dust followed up the path of the horses and rolled over us, putting everything into a yellow haze.

"How're yuh there, Irma, gal!" the man shouted and leaped out of the carriage without paying any heed to the step. He came toward Irma with his arms outstretched. He tossed something he'd had in his hand to one of the waiting help. It was a bottle like those I'd seen in the swamp.

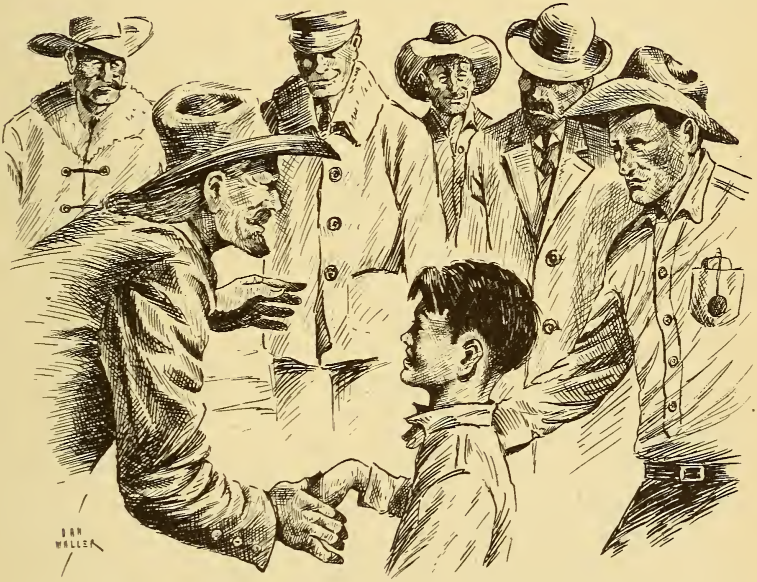
"Pa!" Irma shouted and was engulfed in his arms.

"Yuh should see all the pretty things I brung you, gal. Yuh'll be so all-fired pretty there won't be a man in the county I won't have t'chase off Scout's Rest."

"Oh, Paaaa!" Irma protested, almighty pleased.

"Yuh jus' wait t'see when we get those bôxes out from North Platte." He pushed Irma out to arms' length and looked at the men around the gatepost.

"Howdy, Slash," he roared. "How's Alf Slade these days? How'd yuh like t'harness up a team an' go in an' pick up the boxes an' baggage at the station? An' mind yuh, Slash, don't yuh go breakin' in any o' my special



"Oh!" he said. "You must be Carl Muller's boy. Howdy, son. I'm mighty glad t'see yuh."

boxes." All the help laughed uproariously. Uncle Bill pulled Irma back into his arms for another big hug.

"Nos'r, Colonel, I sure won't," Slash said and turned and hobbled swiftly for the horsebarn.

"Lessee now," Uncle Bill said, "I guess yuh know all these hombres, Irma. Mr. Salsbury, Major Burke, and Colonel Richardson."

"I know them, Pa," Irma said and turned to the men who had climbed down from the carriage. "Howdy, gentlemen. Welcome to Scout's Rest."

They all shook her hand and she talked to them while Uncle Bill roared out greetings to the help around the gate. He shook every hand and clapped most of the men on the shoulder. One of the men Mr. Knox introduced to him, and he said he hoped the man would like working for him. He came to me.

"Oh!" he said. "You must be Carl Muller's boy. Howdy, son. I'm mighty glad t'see yuh, yuh betcha." He shook my hand.

Then Irma came alongside him and held onto his left arm and urged him toward the house. "I've got so many things to tell you, Pa, and to show you. Come along," and she urged him faster.

Major Burke, Colonel Richardson, and Mr. Salsbury followed them and I trailed along after. We climbed to the porch and Aunt Lou was in the doorway, looking, I thought, not as happy as she should.

"Howdy, Lou," Uncle Bill said, not so loud as before, nor so eager.

"Hello, Will," she answered. Her eyes searched his face for a brief moment. She turned and walked rapidly to the hall and on to her room.

Uncle Bill stood for a moment and chewed at the overhang of his grey moustache. Then he turned to his companions.

"Come in an' make yuhrselves t'home, boys. Drink eat, an' sleep, an' do anything that'll give yuh joy, for Scout's Rest an' all's in it is yuhrs."

They all began talking at once. No one seemed to notice me and so I edged around them to the hall door and went down it to my room. I thought I heard something behind the door of Aunt Lou's room, like someone crying. But I knew that wasn't so with Uncle Bill just back. Gosh!

I stood in the middle of the floor wondering what to do. Everyone was so busy and happy out there in the parlor I felt kind of as if maybe I was something extra that hadn't been asked for and wasn't wanted.

I hadn't drawn any since I'd come to Scout's Rest. There'd been too many things to see and do. Now I dug down into the drawer where I'd put the big sheet of wrapping paper Ma had got for me at the store in Choteau and took out my two pencils. I sat down at my table. For a while I wondered what I should draw, and then I could see the carriage with Uncle Bill standing up in front and the yellow cloud of dust and the men at the gate waving and stomping and yelling their greetings. That was it! I set to work on it. I guess drawing Uncle Bill's homecoming made me feel less left out.

I don't know how much later it was I heard some sounds in the kitchen. There weren't any other noises about the house, although I dimly remembered that at first while I was at work there had been a good deal of guffawing from the parlor. I went to the kitchen to see what was going on.

Aunt Lou was there, and Mrs. Knox was helping.

Mrs. Knox had never been to the house before. She was busy making pies and Aunt Lou was scraping some carrots at the sink.

"Aunt Lou," I said. "Is Uncle Bill — — ?"

"They've had a long journey and they're all resting," Aunt Lou said. "So don't you go to making any noise."

"No'm," I said. "I sure won't."

Aunt Lou seemed to be awful busy in the kitchen. I went outside. I ambled over toward the swamp and on past that and past the far pasture where the cows were gathered about the fence to be let through to come to the barn to be milked. They saw me coming and they stood there watching me, chewing their cuds sort of in anticipation of the fine feed of ground oats and silage they'd get while they stood with their heads in the stanchions to be milked. When I tried to stroke the nose of one through the wire of the fence it moved slowly back a step just out of my reach.

I stayed out until I heard the cowbell clanking away up the lane to the barn. It was quite dark. I went in the kitchen door.

The table was set with just three places, and I looked up at Aunt Lou in surprise.

"We'll give the men their supper in the dining room, Dan," she told me with a smile. "Irma, you, and I'll eat out here in the kitchen as usual."

We'd always all eaten together at the Cross-Up, even when Hossface came to see us, and I must have looked puzzled. Aunt Lou explained: "The men always have a good deal to talk about to each other. Business about the show and things. So we always leave them alone to their talking."

Pretty soon Irma came out and I heard the men scraping their chairs up to the table in the dining room. Mrs. Knox hurried in and out with dishes of steaming food, and Aunt Lou got them ready for her to take in. Pretty soon there wasn't so much rushing, and Aunt Lou says, "Well, I guess Mrs. Knox can take care of them now. Sit down, children, and we'll eat our supper."

It sure was a good supper. We could hear the men talking and laughing in the dining room and occasionally one of them would burst out loud enough so we could hear what he said. We were just getting around to the apple pie when I heard someone come into the hall. He bumped into the wall and brushed roughly against it for a space, and we heard a harsh "God dammit t'hell!" Then a match scratched on the wall and the steps moved unsteadily away toward the bedrooms.

Irma and Aunt Lou looked at each other for a moment. Then Irma giggled, and Aunt Lou's mouth became a narrow straight line. She didn't finish her pie but sat stiffly as if listening. She just kept on sitting that way when the steps came back along the hall and turned into the dining room.

I finished my pie and drank the last of my milk. Aunt Lou noticed the milk was gone and she asked absently, "Do you want some more milk, Dan."

"No'm, thank you," I said.

"LULU!" Uncle Bill roared from the dining room. "Come here a minute!"

She got to her feet and marched stiffly through the swinging door.

Irma and I could hear Uncle Bill's deep voice rumble something, and Aunt Lou's higher voice answer, "It must be Dan's."

Irma looked at me and I shrank. *What had I done?*

Aunt Lou pushed into the kitchen. "Dan, your Uncle Bill wants you."

I got down from my chair slowly. "Yes'm," I said.

Aunt Lou smiled at me, though her lips were still drawn pretty straight. "There's nothing wrong, Dan boy. It's just that he found a picture in your room."

I still wasn't free of fear. I liked big Uncle Bill. I liked his rough, hearty ways. But I guess I was afraid of him too. I didn't enjoy that walk into the dining room.

"Here he is!" Uncle Bill said loudly. His face was shiny red and his eyes sparkled under his heavy lashes. He said, "Yuh've heard me tell of Carl Muller. This is his boy Dan. I visited Carl once when this youngster was no bigger'n a grasshopper. He drew a picture for me then 'at was pretty good. So when I ran onto this here picture I knew Dan had done it." He turned to me. "This is a better picture, Dan. This is mighty fine."

He had the piece of wrapping paper on the table and the other three men were looking at it.

"We was wonderin' how jest a boy could draw so fine," Uncle Bill said, "an' we thought we'd ask yuh t'come in an' draw a picture for us while we set a-watchin'. Would yuh draw for us, Dan"

Even in the yellow light of the oil lamps I suppose they could see my face get red. " 'Course," Uncle Bill added, "if yuh don't wanna, it's all right. But we thought yuh might."

His gray moustache bent down toward me and his blue eyes beamed consideration. He reached out and with a big hand grasped my upper arm gently and drew me inside his knees. "Will yuh do that for yuhr Uncle Bill, Dan?"

I looked at his close, warm face. "Yes'r," I said, surprising myself more than them. "I'll be glad to, Uncle Bill."

"That'sa a boy!" he approved and clapped me on the shoulder.

"I'll get my paper and pencil," I said and ran for my room.

I was back in a minute, and they pushed the plates and tableware and bottles to one side and brought a chair up for me to sit on. But it was so low that I couldn't see to work very well. "Here," Major Burke said. "Let me sit there, boy." I got up, and he sat down in the chair and then picked me up and set me on his knee. This height was just right. I waited.

"Well?" said Uncle Bill.

"What do yuh want me t'draw?"

He pulled his beard. "Well, now, I guess I don't know. Could yuh draw me a picture of Carl—yuhr Pa?"

"A-breakin' a hoss?" I asked eagerly, the picture already in my mind.

"I couldn't ask for a better," Uncle Bill said.

So I set to work. The men talked on about a number of things and once in a while they'd look over my shoulder at what I was doing. After the second time Uncle Bill looked, he said, "That's sure 'nuff Carl. I remember that boy. Wasn't a better scout in the West. I recall a time when we was camped on the Republican. We was headin' for Fort McPherson t'the north. Carl had a red bay bronc that was all hoss. Carl could do most anythin' with 'im—had the ol' Injun sign on 'im. He tol' me onct, 'Bill, I gotta have the password ev'ry time I fork 'im.' The hoss's name was Kitten, but it sure 'nuff wasn't a tame kitten.

"Carl an' I was a-settin' before our fire, passin' the bottle an' figgerin' as how we'd get goin' when it was empty, when along come a Mormon outfit headin' southwest. Jest a small wagon pulled by a team an' a hoss tied on behind. They stopped an' a large party disengages 'imself. He had funny chin whiskers an' a hat like a preacher's. He inquires would we sell 'im a saddle hoss because he needs one right bad. I told 'im we didn't have an extry, but the cuss was right insistent an' kept a-beggin' us. He said he'd trade his crowbait that was tied t'the back o' the wagon. Carl didn't say nary a word. The cuss wasn't t'be denied.

"When I told 'im the extry hoss belongs t'Carl, he turns to 'im with a plea endin' up with a bit of scripcher.

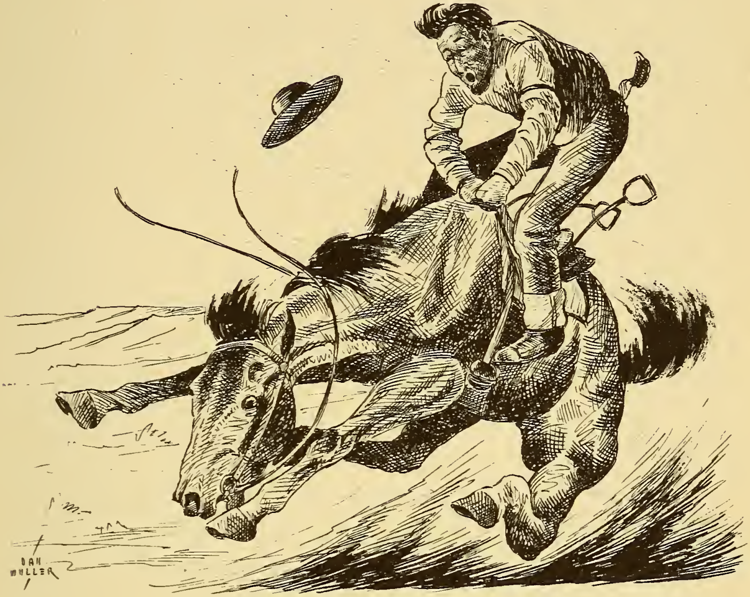
"Carl got t'his feet. 'Yuh want that there bay, mister?' The light o' hope come t'the pilgrim's eyes. 'Name yer price. I'm prepared t'pay it.' Carl says, 'C'n yuh ride a hoss, mister?' The Mormon says, 'I'm prepared to pay fer the brute—an' I don't appreciate yuhr compliment!' Carl looks 'im over from his head to his toes. 'Mister,' says Carl, 'the hoss is yuhrs—if yuh c'n ride 'im.'

"The pilgrim couldn't believe his luck. 'It's a deal,' he says, an' offers his hand t'Carl. Carl says, 'We'll shake on the deal arter yuh ride 'im. Go 'head an' saddle 'im.'

"The Mormon reaches inta the wagon an' comes out with a old army saddle. He throws it acrost the bay's back. The bay behaves like a ol' plowhoss. He even stands for the bridlin'.

"The country longabouts there is mostly level 'ceptin' for some rimrock gulies. The disciple o' the Latter

Day Saints lays over the reins, he'ps 'imself up by usin' a hand on both the pommel an' the cantle—which ev'ry self-respectin' hoss knows is wrong. We c'd see where the bay let one ear droop—too bad the pilgrim couldn't read sign. He puts his feet in the stirrups, gathers his reins an' lookin' at Carl he clucks t'the bay.



"Did y'ever see an explosion? Well, that there bay jus' exploded."

"Did y'ever see an explosion? Well, that there bay jus' exploded—nothin' else. The pilgrim was a powerful human, built like a ox, but he started a-reachin' for ev'rything from the hoss's mane t'his tail. After that fust explosion the bay lights out for all he's worth, payin' no attention to 'is rider.

"Carl lights acrost the dun's bare back an' I do the same on my hoss an' we follows. The bay skirts a rimrock. When he's abreast a steep ledge rock he goes t'buckin' in the style t'which he's accustomed. The pilgrim's shook loose the fust buck an' then the bay bogs 'is head an' over the ledge goes the Latter Day Saint.

"The bay stands there, an' when we comes up I swear t'yuh gents he's grinnin', s'help me! We was both afraid t'look over the rimrock. We figgers the remains is all scrambled an' ready for the vultures. But when we do look, we see 'bout ten feet down a box elder tree. Cradled in its protectin' arms lays this yere Mormon, right side up. He's bruised, but not hurt. But he can't get down nor up.

"Carl climbs off the dun and mounts the bay. I guess he gives the password, 'cause the bay set out for camp. Carl dismounts, takes off the Mormon's saddle and throws on his own. He runs the bay back. On top the ledge he says, uncoilin' his rope, 'Mister, if yuh're aimin' t'get back t'yuhr wagon yuh better try standin' up.'

"The man cautiously gets into a half sittin' position. 'Hol' yuhr hands in the air, mister,' Carl calls.

"He slowly builds 'imself a critical loop and snakes his rope out with a hiss an' gets the man 'round the arms. Carl takes a quick dally on his horn an' very unceremoniously yanks the pilgrim up the bluff.

"While the Mormon is organizin' 'imself on top the ledge Carl asks, 'Want t'try 'im again, mister?' The Mormon, he don't answer.

"Arter we breaks camp Carl tol' me real serious, 'Yuh know what, Bill. I ain't never believed in prayer, nosir, but I do now, yuh bet. While the Mormon was a-saddlin' I could tell by lookin' at the bay that the hoss was prayin'. Seemed t'me like he was sayin' "Amen." When I see the pilgrim growin' outa that tree I'm sure the bay's prayers has been answered, yuh bet.' "

I listened all the time Uncle Bill was telling the story about Pa. It made it all the easier to draw Pa on Chuck, because what Uncle Bill said made it just like Pa was there.

I finished the drawing just after Uncle Bill had completed his story. They all said they liked it, and I was ready to draw them another when Aunt Lou came in. She said, "Come, Dan. It's pretty late. You better go to bed."

And it seemed to me as if her mouth was drawn just as tight as it had been at supper.

CHAPTER 5

An Unwilling Scholar

I DIDN'T see much of Uncle Bill for the next three days. On the second day he took Irma into town to put her on the train for school, and most of the rest of the time he was busy around the ranch. After I'd gone to bed I could hear him and the other men in the dining room. Their bottles would clink and they'd laugh and talk in loud voices.

Aunt Louisa didn't like these goings on very well, I guess. She didn't ever eat with Uncle Bill and his guests, but always set the table in the kitchen for the two of us. Unless Uncle Bill called for her to come she never went into the dining room. Then her mouth would firm up like it had that first time and it didn't look like she'd answer if you talked to her.

I was playing like I was roping a steer out by the cow trough on the fourth morning after Uncle Bill had come home, when he came riding in a buckboard out of the horse barn. "Hey, Dan," he called. "Climb aboard here and come with me."

I dropped my rope and ran like fury. He smiled at me as I climbed to the seat beside him. "Yuh like t'keep on the move, huh?"

I grinned.

He clucked to the horses and we took off at a right smart pace. The varnished spokes near my left foot twinkled little sparks of light into my eyes.

"I been thinkin'," Uncle Bill said. "Can yuh read an' write an' figger?"

"Nosir, I said. A disturbing sensation crept into my stomach.

"Well, now, look here, Dan. Yuh're almost ten. Most younguns yuhr age can cipher and read and write. I couldn't, but that wasn't nobody's fault because they just wasn't no school 'round I could go to, an' besides I set t'work pretty early. An' when I learned later it was a-heap harder for me than it was for th' young boys. We got a li'l ol' school down the road jus' a piece. They ain't no reason why yuh shouldn't go and get all fitted out with learnin' like the other younguns 'round here. So we're goin' over to enroll yuh in school this mornin'."

I didn't say anything for a time. That feeling deep down in my belly sure wasn't a pleasant one. "I'm gonna be a cowboy," I said finally.

"Yuh be?"

"I sure am. A cowboy don't need t'know writin' an' readin' and 'rithmetic."

Out of the corner of my downcast eye I could see Uncle Bill turn his glance on me and smile broadly. "Not the dumb ones. They don't need t'learn nothin'. But do they ever get t'own a brand o' their own?"

I didn't answer because my sinking feeling told me I'd already lost the battle. Uncle Bill pulled at his moustache and answered his own question.

"Not them cowpokes. They're lucky t'own their own bedroll and a pony they can toss a leg over when they get that itchin' feeling in the bottom o'their boots. But the ones who can cipher — like y'r Pa — they gets t'figgerin' how t'own their own spread, an' pretty soon they has it. Yuh c'n be a cowboy if yuh wants, Dan, but yuh're gonna be one cowpoke that c'n read an' write an' cipher."

I knew I was sunk and sat quiet for the rest of the trip. Pretty soon Uncle Bill broke the silence:

"D'yuh know that Comanche hoss in the barn?"

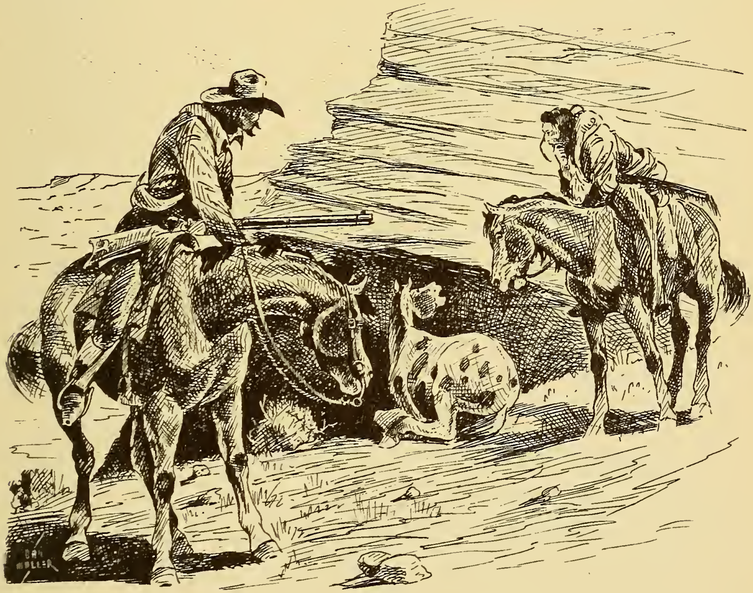
I mumbled a disconsolate assent.

"D'ja ever hear tell how come I got his pa?"

"Nosir," I said, clearly enough now.

"It was a time I was in the Dakotas arter the heavy Injun fightin' had let up. The Sioux was my friends, an' I was visitin' with Grey Eagle, the chief of a Brule Sioux tribe. We was huntin' some. I could savvy the Sioux tongue pretty well, an' some o' the time Grey Eagle and his braves would tell stories, some of 'em drawin' the bow pretty far back, but good stories jus' the same. One time on a huntin' trip Grey Eagle and I was ridin' in the lead, as befits a chief and his guest, when by a stream we come upon the fresh trail of a party o' hosses. We could tell they had riders because o' the deep tracks made by the hoofs. Grey Eagle thinks they may be on the trail of some Blackfeet, who ain't too friendly to the Sioux, or p'raps some Gros Ventres whose hosses Grey Eagle now has in his camp after a successful raid.

"So we draws back a good bit from the stream, circles 'round, an' comes back to it a few miles farther down. We crost it an' we wasn't long in pickin' up fresh buffalo sign. The sage was tall and a windbreak o' willows pertected our 'proach. We come t'the foot of a cliff with low bushes, broken rock an' jack pine under it. Right out where the westerin' sun could shine on it full, but under the pertection o' the ledge, lay a mare o' peculiar blue markin's. Her legs was doubled up under her; it sure was plain she was in pain. She didn't move as we come near. 'Injun hoss?' I asks Grey Eagle. He grunts an' nods. The mare was a war pony I



" 'Injun hoss?' I asks Grey Eagle. He grunts an' nods."

guessed from the ol' paint markin's on her sides. She raised her head and looked at us. It was plain she was with foal and it would be only a matter of a few hours before she dropped her colt. Grey Eagle says we ought t'pitch camp, so we left the women folks t'watch the mare.

"We come up a rise an' there was a great cloud o' dust risin' in the sky comin' direct toward us. About a mile ahead of us was a small band of Injuns. They was Arickarees, a friendly tribe. We could tell what they was by their dress an' trappin's. We all of us pitched in an' got our share o' the buffalo. Arter'ards we talked to the Arickarees, an' their chief tol' us that the mare was one they'd got in a raid on the Comanches. They'd left her behind t'die because they didn't want t'stop. Well we left the younger men there t'skin the kill and we rode back t'camp. The mare had foaled, the cutest, gangliest-legged blue colt ever.

"I told Grey Eagle how much I admired the colt, an' a couple o' days later when I was takin' my departure, Grey Eagle says as how he was givin' me the blue colt. I laughed an' tol' him I couldn't take the colt away from his mama. He only grunted. . . Well, 'bout a year later a young Sioux rides up t'Fort McPherson with the prettiest li'l blue colt yuh ever saw. 'For Pahaska,' he tol' me, 'from Grey Eagle,' an' he thrusts the lead rope in my hand.

"Well, Dan, Comanche is one o' that colt's colts."

I'd listened entranced to this story of Uncle Bill's. We were just pulling up to the little white schoolhouse.

We got out of the buggy and Uncle Bill took me by the hand and led me into the room. There were maybe eight or nine boys and girls in the room, some older and some younger than me. In the front of the room was a woman with a lace collar high around her neck, and around this was a black velvet ribbon. She was thin, and her features were sharp. She had a pointer in her hand, and with it she was pointing to some figures chalked on the blackboard. She paid no attention to us but continued her talk to the pupils, who weren't so conscience-bound as herself. They looked at us and a little girl giggled. I heard a boy whisper, "That's Buffalo Bill!"

Pretty soon the teacher finished what she had to tell the class and she put the pointer down and turned to Uncle Bill.

"Mam," said Uncle Bill, "I'm William Cody from Scout's Rest. This here is Dan Cody Muller, my ward. I want to enter him in your school."

She smiled thinly. "That's fine, Mr. Cody. Won't you sit down here by my desk. I shall need to ask you some questions."

"Why, thank yuh, mam," said Uncle Bill. "I'll be right pleased to."

He sat down in a chair next the teacher's desk and I stood alongside of him.

"I'm Miss Purdy," said the teacher. She picked up her pen and brought out a piece of paper ruled into squares. "Did you say the child's name is Dan Cody Muller?"

"That's right, Miss Purdy," Uncle Bill said.

"Not Daniel?"

"It's Dan!" I spoke out.

She raised her eyes to Uncle Bill and he nodded.

"How far has Dan progressed in school?" she asked.

"Well, now he ain't rightly gone t'school at all," Uncle Bill said. He said it apologetically, and I shivered in the chill disapproval mirrored in Miss Purdy's blue eyes.

"The education of the young child is far too important to neglect," Miss Purdy observed.

"He couldn't help that none, mam," Uncle Bill told her. "Yuh see, he's been livin' all his life on a ranch way up in Montana where they wan't no school for him t'go to. But now he's come t'live with me and he's goin' t'make up for all that lost time."

I'm sure Miss Purdy gave a mental if not an audible sniff at this point. And she had every right to, because of my thoughts as I stood there. I had no intention of working hard at books to learn what I didn't want or need. I was going to be a cowboy and Uncle Bill might insist that I go to school but he couldn't insist that I work at learning.

"I hope so," Miss Purdy said.

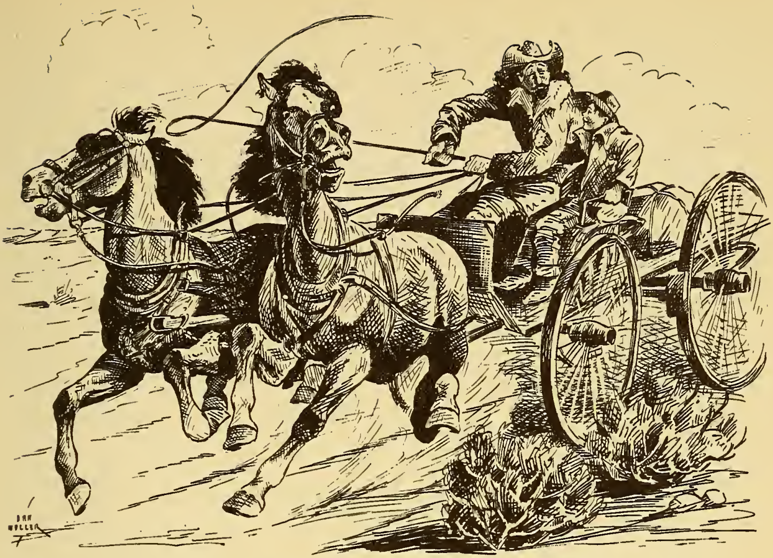
"We're goin' on in t' North Platte," Uncle Bill told her, "t'get some things, an' I thought if they was somethin' we oughtta get for school we might pick it up."

"I'll make a list of books and supplies," Miss Purdy said. "Dan will be in school Monday morning?"

"Yes, Mam," Uncle Bill said.

The ride into North Platte was a nice one. We sat on the cushion of the buckboard and the horses kept up a steady, mile-eating pace all the way into town.

Our first stop was at the gent's furnishing store. I'd never been in one with so many things to sell. The man in the store greeted Uncle Bill effusively. "This here's my ward," Uncle Bill told him. "I want yuh t'fit him out like the other boys 'round here. Jus' put it on my bill. . . An' while yuh're doin' that, I'll take



The horses kept up a steady, mile-eating pace all the way into town.

care of a little business down the street," and he winked at the man.

Well, they sure fixed me up in that store. A suit, some extra pants, heavy underclothes, stockings, shoes, a cap that had flaps you could pull down over your ears to keep them warm in cold weather, and even handkerchiefs.

Uncle Bill came back as they were tying up the bundle. We put the package in the buckboard and climbed up to the seat. Uncle Bill was pulling gently on the reins to get away from the hitchrack when a young man, not very tall, but nice looking, stepped off the sidewalk and came to the rig.

"Hi, there, Johnny!" Uncle Bill said. "When d'yuh get in?"

"Jus' now, Colonel," the man said. "I was jus' startin' out t'Scouts Rest. How's Mrs. Cody?"

"Well, now, she's so healthy I 'spect she'll outlive even a tough old hombre like me," and Uncle Bill laughed. "Say, Johnny, he went on, turning t' me, "I want yuh t'meet my ward. He jus' come t'live with us. Yuh remember me tellin' of Carl Muller. Well, this here's his boy, Dan. Dan, say 'howdy' to the best trick shot in the show business, Johnny Baker."

I reached across his knees to shake hands with Johnny, who laughed in protest, though there was evidence in the flush of his cheeks that he liked the praise. "Shucks, don't yuh pay no 'tention t'what the Colonel says, Dan. The Colonel, himself, is the world's best shot, tricks or no tricks. An' don't let no one tell yuh different."

"Nos'r" I said.

"Yuh know, Dan," Uncle Bill said, half smiling and appearing not to see the things in front of his eyes, "I come to know Johnny when he was just a little shaver. He was always tryin' t'be of help, an' it wasn't long 'fore I was thinkin' of him jus' like a son. Why, he wasn't no more'n yuhr size when he started travelin' with the Show. Maybe, we'll take you with us on tour after a couple of years. D'yuh think yuh'd like that?"

"Gosh!" I said, and my eyes must have been bigger than my face.

Uncle Bill threw the reins into my hands. "Yuh hold the hosses for a bit. Johnny an' I'll go an' have jus' one glass o' greetin'."

I sat there holding the lines for a long time. The horses would stand for a while with most of their weight on one back leg, and then they'd shift it to the other. Occasionally they'd lift a leg and stomp down hard with it. When Uncle Bill came back out of the saloon and climbed to the seat beside me, his face was red, and the smell on him was like it used to be on Pa and Hossface after they'd been having a session out in the barn of the Cross-Up with the gallon jug old Mr. Satterfield used to sell. Johnny Baker said he guessed he'd stay in town a while now he'd seen the Colonel.

All the long way out to Scout's Rest Uncle Bill sat on his side of the buckboard without saying much. Once in a while he'd chirp at the horses, or he'd sing a part of a song. Once in a while he'd lift up his hand and slap me on the shoulder. "How're yuh there, Dan? How yuh, Boy?" It made me warm all over every time he did it. It was long after dark when we got back to Scout's Rest.

The next day Aunt Louisa had me try on all the new clothes. Some she said needed fitting she put pins in when I had them on. These she took out to the kitchen with her and put them in her workbasket by the chair next the window. On the whole she thought Uncle Bill had made a good choice. It seemed best not to tell her that he'd told the clerk to fit me out.

"He can be real good when he wants to be," Aunt Louisa said. "If only Colonel Judson had found somebody else to make a dime-novel hero of!" She said it absently as she ripped out the stitches in a pair of my new pants. Then she looked up at me. "Pshaw!" she said. "You go out and play, Dan. I'm too busy to be talking nonsense with boys."

Uncle Bill was out in the yard with Major Burke and Slash Stacey. Slash was adjusting a saddle on the back of Comanche. "Come here, Dan," Uncle Bill called. "I want t' see yuh ride this critter."

My eyes must have lighted like the stars at night. I hadn't ridden a pony since before I buried Otejo back at the Cross-Up. I came running.

"Mount," said Major Burke.

"Yes'r," I said. I gathered the reins in one hand and gently drew Comanche's head to my side. I could just reach the pommel of the McClellan saddle. I took note of the stirrup, lifted my left foot, and hopped up on the other. My foot found the stirrup, and I threw my right leg over the cantle, and settled into the saddle. Uncle Bill's blue eyes beamed approval. The stirrups were too long and after Slash had shortened them, Uncle Bill said, "Now put him through his paces here. I want t'see how yuh do."

I trotted and loped Comanche about the place while Uncle Bill, the Major, and Slash watched. "Keep your shoulders back, lad," Major Burke called, and I straightened. Comanche had good action and it wasn't hard to look well on him. "Bring 'im here, Dan," Uncle Bill called, after about ten minutes.

When I came up and dismounted he said, "Guess the two of yuh'll get along all right. He's a good hoss, an' yuh know how t'ride him."

I grinned at him.

"Comanche," he went on, "is yuhr hoss. Yuh'll ride 'im t'school and yuh'll take care of 'im. But remember, I won't stand for ill-treatin' an animal o' mine. If yuh abuse 'im I'll take 'im away faster'n yuh can say 'Jack Robinson.' Yuh hear?"

"Yes'r," I said. "I'll treat him fine, Uncle Bill."

He clapped me on the shoulder and smiled at me. "If I wasn't sure of it, Dan, yuh'd a-never got the chance t'ride 'im."

CHAPTER
6

A Cody Christmas

SCOUT'S REST was so new and different that I thought I'd always be surprised, that I'd remember everything that happened, no matter how small it might be. But within a short time things dropped into a regular pattern from day to day, so that time went by without my paying any attention to it.

School wasn't fun. Miss Purdy made it as easy as she could for me. I suppose I should be modest and say I was pretty dumb; but I don't think I was. I resented being grouped with the two six-year-olds. Since I didn't know even as much as they, it was necessary. I didn't know as much about school work, that it. I wasn't good at memorizing. It seemed plumb foolishness to me to just commit to memory such meaningless things as one and one are two, two and two are four, four and four are . . .

Miss Purdy was very patient. She'd keep me after school once in a while to explain the things I was supposed to learn and the reasons it was necessary to learn them. Perhaps my staying did some good. I don't know. I do know I didn't want to learn all that rubbish.

Miss Purdy, however, was very pleased by my work in one of her subjects. Almost every time I finished some art work she'd hang it up on top of the blackboard and point out the good things I'd done in it to the other children. Miss Purdy was nice. I guess she knew that as strange as things were for me I could stand a little encouragement.

But even when I was working on a drawing I would rather have been on Comanche's back loping down the trail. If Nebraska didn't have mountains that held mysterious blues and purples of distant, steep-rising hills, it did have Comanche, other horses, and range cattle. Atop Comanche Nebraska didn't seem so awfully different to me than the country around the Cross-Up. On Comanche I could forget the dark little schoolroom and its smell of chalk, the bits of burning food the class threw on top of the hot Round Oak stove, and the unwashed bodies of one or two of my schoolmates.

The lads at school treated me all right. They did josh me about the clothes I'd had on when Uncle Bill had brought me to school, and some of the bigger boys were a little rough on me at first.

They called me "cowboy" because during recess I played around with my rope or fussed with Comanche. Lonnie, one of the older boys, thought I was just showing off, and, before the whole school, he challenged me to ride a horse he'd bring to school on Saturday. He said if he couldn't ride it better than I could, he'd give me his jackknife. So I said I'd give him my new cap if I couldn't. The rest of the boys were in on it and when I rode up to the school on Saturday morning they were all there except Lonnie. He came in sight soon after; he had a skittish-acting horse tied to his saddle horn.

We tossed a nickel for first ride, and Lonnie won. He threw his saddle on the bronc. The horse didn't seem to mind the saddling, but I could tell by the way he kept squeezing his tail between his legs, by the amount of white in his frightened eyes, and by his dropping ears he was going to buck. Lonnie wasn't so dumb. He saw the signs, too, and now he wasn't so eager. He mounted loosely. He hadn't gathered in his halter shank before the boy holding the bronc let him go.

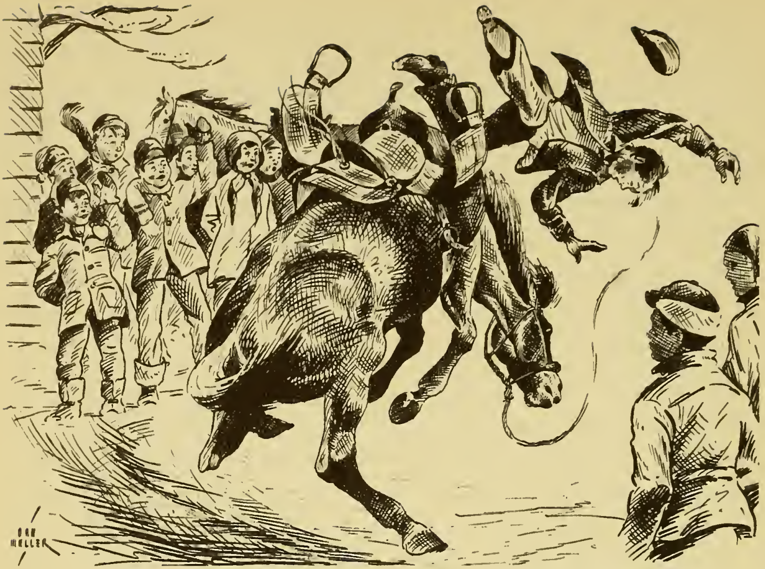
Having his head loose, the bronc bucked. Not too wildly — it was really just crow-hopping. But Lonnie was shaken loose on the second jump. He hit the ground hard.

We all ran to him. His nose was bleeding and he had a rapidly swelling bump on the side of his head. We threw some water on him and he came to all right.

One of the boys caught the bronc and brought him back. I was kind of scared, but I couldn't back out of the dare.

I loosened the cinch and pulled off Lonnie's saddle and then threw on my own. I thought I knew what the horse would do. I mounted quickly, gathered a handful of close rein, and held his head in check.

Well, that horse suspected I knew what I was doing. He didn't buck. He just trotted off nice as you please.



Lonnie was shaken loose on the second jump. He hit the ground hard.

In my mind I thanked Hossface for the lessons he had given me in handling a horse back at the old Cross-Up.

I rode the bronc back to the boys and dismounted, handed the reins to one of them, and slid off my saddle and cinched it again on Comanche.

"Well," I said, "I told you I could ride. Now I'll show you I can rope too."

It was pretty boastful, and if a brat of mine acted as smart-alecky as that I'd probably give him a good whopping. But there was no one to give me my comeuppance, and a couple of lads were eager to play calf to my rope. I had no trouble dabbing a loop over them.

After that there wasn't anybody that wanted to josh me about my old clothes or playing cowboy or drawing so well, or anything. We got on real good together.

Christmas was coming pretty close. Aunt Louisa took me into North Platte with her and gave me some money to buy Christmas presents for Ma and Ben. I got Ma a new gingham dress and Ben a wooden train. Aunt Louisa helped me to wrap and send them off by express.

"Ma always had a tree on the Cross-Up," I told her, hopefully, on the drive back to Scout's Rest. She didn't say anything.

I'd spent all the money she had given me on Ma and Ben's presents, so in the little time that remained I worked in my room on drawings for Uncle Bill, Irma, and Aunt Louisa.

Major Burke had left some weeks before, and so had Mr. Salsbury and Colonel Richardson. But there had been several groups of guests since. Seems like Uncle Bill always had a crowd of people around him. He loved crowds best.

I remember a morning early in December. Aunt Louisa and I had had breakfast in the kitchen at least two hours before the guests and Uncle Bill got up, and she was frying ham and eggs on the stove for them. She took the platters and told me to bring the coffee pot.

Uncle Bill was laughing with Major Russell. He had a bottle in his hand and he waved it as we came in. "Mornin', Lulu; mornin', Dan. How's my li'l artist this mornin'?"

Aunt Louisa gasped. She put the tray on the table with a little bang and swung around and went back to the kitchen quick.

"Well, well, what's wrong?" asked Uncle Bill, a little chastened, but still the genial, gracious host. He turned to Major Russell and the other guests. "Sit down, gentlemen, an' eat hearty."

I could have told him what was wrong. And it was a tribute to the inate dignity of the man and evidence of the respect with which his friends regarded him that not the slightest attention was paid to it. Above the waist Uncle Bill was dressed just as usual. But below the waist he had on only his long, red woolen underdrawers!

Irma was coming home for Christmas, and Uncle Bill's sister, May, and her husband, Mr. Decker, were coming too. When Aunt Louisa found out May was coming her mouth got grim again like it did when Uncle Bill called her "Lulu." She didn't say anything though.

When Irma came two days before Christmas, she brought home a lot of things, including some candy she told me to help myself to. I did.

We had it pretty nice for her when she came. Aunt Louisa had had Slash go out and cut a Christmas tree, and we had it up, decorated with tinsel, and little painted glass balls, and strings of popcorn. There was a white angel on the very tip of the tree up near the ceiling. We weren't going to light the candles until Christmas night.

May and Mr. Decker came the day before Christmas. May wasn't as big as Aunt Louisa. She had a puny little chin that could set with as much determination as anyone's I've ever seen. Her black eyes were set close to either side of her narrow little nose, and they had a cold and penetrating look that made me think a steel drill would be more comfortable to feel. Her wrinkled face was like badly tanned rawhide. Mr. Decker was about six feet tall, and had brown hair and moustache. He was easy-going, but when May was around he didn't say much. If he did say something he'd sort of look at her out of the corner of his eyes as if making sure he wasn't saying anything she wouldn't approve of.

"What's this?" May snapped when she came in the door. "A Christmas tree! You ain't had one since Irma was real small."

"We put it up for Dan," Aunt Louisa said, a cold little smile on her lips.

"Dan? Who's that?"

"He's the son of one of Will's friends during the old scouting days. His father died and we're bringing him up." Aunt Louisa put a hand on my shoulder and pushed me a little forward. "This is Dan Muller. Dan, this is Mrs. Decker."

I said, "Howdy, mam."

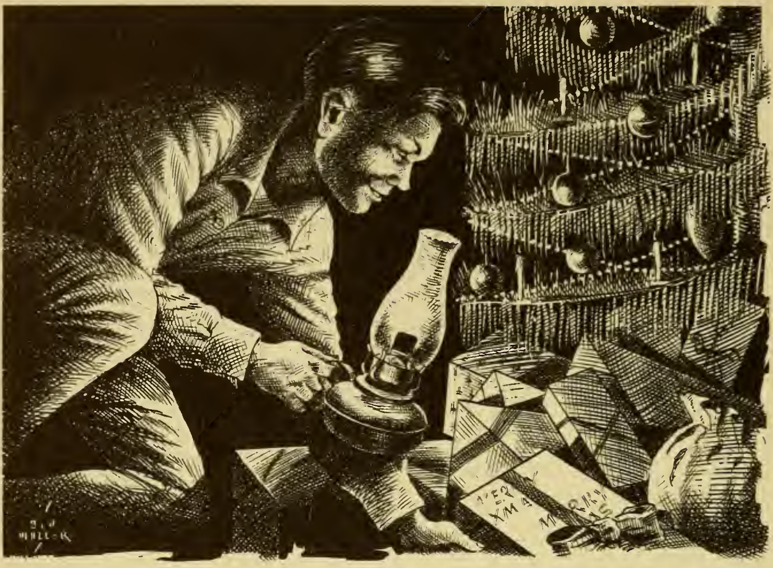
May looked at me and sniffed. "Hmmmph," she said. "Will'll be runnin' a kindergarten 'fore you know it."

In the barn that night, Uncle Bill said apologetically to me, "Don't yuh mind May, Dan. She's a sharp-spoken one, but she don't mean nothin' by it."

I guess I was up before anyone Christmas morning. I went to the parlor and under that big tree were heaps and heaps of presents they'd put there the night before after they'd sent me to bed. It wasn't light yet, but the green and red and white paper packages tied with gilt string sure were pretty in the light of my oil lamp.

I went back to my room and got the pictures I'd drawn for Aunt Louisa, Uncle Bill, and Irma and put them under the tree. I wished I had some of that pretty paper and string to tie them up with.

Then I went back to my room and got my clothes



I guess I was up before anyone Christmas morning.

and took them to the kitchen. I stirred up the fire and put on some fresh coal. There was some coffee in the pot on the back of the stove, and I pulled it to the front where it'd get hot. Then I dressed in front of the open oven door. I wondered how long it'd be before they got up and we could open the presents.

Aunt Louisa came as I was sitting in front of the stove with my feet on the open oven door drinking my coffee and crunching on a dry crust of bread I'd found.

She smiled when she saw me. "Merry Christmas, Dan," she said. "You're up early."

"Yes'm," I answered. "Merry Christmas to you, Aunt Louisa. "When do you think they'll get up?"

She laughed. "Not for another hour, boy. You just be patient. We'll get to those presents long before dinner."

It seemed an awful long time, but finally everyone was up and had breakfast. Then we all went to the parlor, and Uncle Bill started handing out the packages one after the other.

My presents were first because they were the last added to the pile. Aunt Louisa kissed me when she took off the rough wrapping paper and saw the picture of Irma I'd drawn for her. Irma, when she opened hers and found the picture of the young man who had hung around the most just before she'd gone off to school, laughed and laughed and laughed. "Dan, you old innocent, you." she said. "I haven't even written that young man. But now I see his picture I think I will."

And Uncle Bill took his picture — it was as big as I could make it — and stood it up on the mantle. "Why, Dan, that's sure scrumptious," he said, grinning under his moustache. "There's your Pa, and the Mormon in the tree, and there, can yuh believe it, is me. 'Course I was younger 'n that in those days. But it sure 'nough is me. Look here," he urged May, "Dan sure 'nough got a good likeness!"

May looked. She didn't sniff, but she looked like she wanted to. "It's pretty crude," she said.

"Well, he didn't have much t'work with, May," Uncle Bill said. "It'll be different now. Wait a minute, Dan, 'til I find something here." He fished around in the pile and came up with a great big package. "There, now, Dan, yuh'll have all the fittin's for drawin'."

I tore off the wrapping in a hurry. Inside was paper, great big sheets of paper much finer than the art paper they gave us to use in school. Uncle Bill dug around some more and fished out two other packages. "An' here's some more for yuh, Dan."

My eyes got big. More than one present for me. I got the wrappings off in a hurry, you bet. Inside were pencils of different kinds, a lot of crayons, some water colors, even some tubes — I later found they were oil paints — and lots of brushes!

I didn't pay much attention to what other people were getting. I just sat and handled those paints and brushes, thinking what pictures I could make with all those things to make them with!

Then Uncle Bill said loudly, "Dan, here's somethin' more for yuh."

It was a great big package at the very bottom of the pile. Uncle Bill spread his two arms wide to pick it up, and set it down in front of me.

"Yuh can't always be makin' pictures," he said. "Here's somethin' for yuh t'have some fun with, boy."

There was an awful lot of wrapping paper around it. I tore it away in great strips. And then I saw what it was — a big red-painted wagon.

"Come spring," Uncle Bill said, his eyes smiling along with his mouth, "yuh c'n start trainin' that ol' billygoat t'harness."

Gosh! What a Christmas!

CHAPTER
7

Back to Ma

WELL, after Christmas, Aunt May left, Irma went back to school, and some new guests came. There were always new people around Scout's Rest, and most of them, I found when I was older, were well known. The snow stayed deep, and when Comanche lifted a front hoof to step forward he'd send a little shower of snow in front of him.

Along late in February Colonel Judson came on a visit. He dressed like a frontier scout — in fringed buckskins, a kit-fox cap, and a knife at his belt. Under his eyes were thick bulges of black, lifeless flesh. His face was full and the skin was loose; it had purple splotches scattered over it. When he'd turn his head quickly the pendulous flesh would shake and quiver like jelly.

Uncle Bill told me he was one of the best-known writers in the world. "His writin' name is Ned Buntline," he said.

When I told that to Aunt Louisa, she laughed. She said, "Dan, if it hadn't been for that man, my husband would have been like any other pioneer. He'd stay home and watch over his family instead of gallivanting all over the world to show off before folks!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Colonel Judson wrote cheap dime novels. He thought a character named Buffalo Bill would make a good hero. Will was called Buffalo Bill when he was furnishing buffalo meat to the construction crews on the Union Pacific. Well, seems like everyone read those stories. Will became a pioneer hero to the whole country. He wasn't only twenty-six when Colonel Judson thought it'd make a lot of money if the real Buffalo Bill went on the stage. Well, he was sure right. But up till then Will was just another pioneer — a good Indian scout who'd been resourceful and lucky. He made a lot of money on the stage and he made a lot of friends, too, some good and some bad. He wanted to make more money. So he started the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. Then he wasn't only a success in America, but in all the capitals of Europe, too. He hobnobbed with the Prince of Wales and kings and dukes and such. Now he isn't a pioneer anymore. Now he's just another gentleman of the theater."

I guess I didn't understand much of what she said then. I do now.

By the end of February I was pretty tired of school. I didn't want to learn the stuff that Miss Purdy was doing her best to teach me. And I guess she didn't have much luck, although she'd speak encouragingly to me once in a while.

Maybe school seemed bad because the short, cold, winter days reminded me of the Cross-Up and the ways Ma and I were occupied in keeping things going there. I remember on one occasion of even thinking wistfully of a blizzard.

I guess Aunt Louisa, and maybe even Uncle Bill, noticed that I was off my feed a bit. It was a Saturday along about the first of March when Aunt Louisa said to me, "Dan, why are you moping around the house? Why don't you ride Comanche, or talk with Slash, or go and draw something?"

"Aw," I said. "I don' wanna."

"Well, how about a piece of bread and jelly?"

"Naw."

She put down the rolling pin she was using, dusted her hands on her apron, and came over to me. "Look here, young man, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothin'," I said, and I kept looking out the window.

" 'Nothing!' " she repeated. She pulled me around to face her. "Look at me, Dan."

I looked up into her eyes for a moment and then down at her waist where the string of her apron pulled it in. It reminded me of the way Ma's apron string pulled in around her waist. I guess some tears filled my eyes.

Aunt Louisa pulled my face into her waist and pushed it in tight with a hand against the back of my head.

"Now, Dan boy," she said soothingly after a moment, "tell your Aunt Lou all about it."

"There ain't nothin' t'tell," I sobbed. "Everythin's jus' fine. You an' Uncle Bill're jus' swell t'me."

"But — —?" she encouraged, watching my expression.

"Well," I mumbled. "Well, sometimes I get t'thinkin' 'bout Ma."

Aunt Lou's hands tightened about me. She pushed me gently over to the chair by the window, still holding me close, and sat down. Then she pulled me over the arm into her lap.

"Why, it isn't any wonder you miss your Ma, Dan! Any good boy would! Of course you miss her. Now you just have yourself a good cry here where only you and me will know about it."

And I guess I did. Afterwards I went to my room and drew a picture of Aunt Lou rolling pie-crust. But I still missed Ma.

It was several days later that Uncle Bill said to me, "Wait up, Dan. I want t'talk t'you." He reached into his breast pocket and pulled out an envelope. "This here," he said, "is a letter from yuhr Ma."

My eyes must have lighted like stars on a moonless August night.

"She wants t'know how're yuh gettin' along, an' if yuh're well. An' she wonders if yuh miss her an' the ol' Cross-Up."

"Lemme see," I said.

He handed me the envelope and I took out the paper and looked at the pencil marks on it. I couldn't read, but I knew Ma had held the paper in her hands. It was almost like seeing her.

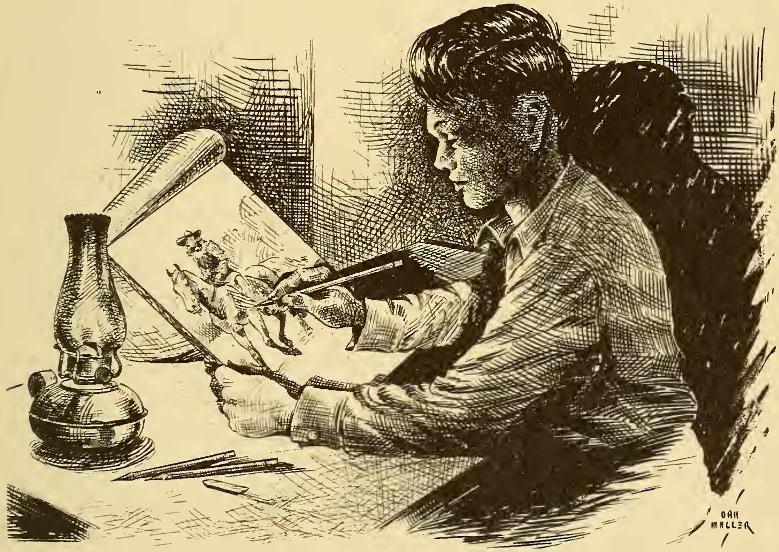
"I been thinkin'," Uncle Bill continued after a minute. "Colonel Judson and me're goin' t'Chicago on business day after t'morrow. Yuh c'd come along, if yuh want. An' when we get t'Chicago, I'll put yuh on a train for New York an' yuh can see yuhr Ma again. D'yuh wanna do that? D'yuh wanna go an' visit yuhr Ma?"

"Gee!" I said. "Geeee!"

He patted me on the back. "That's all settled then. Yuhr Aunt Lou will see that yuhr clothes're ready an' packed.

There were only two days before we went and I sure was busy. I drew a lot of quick pictures of Scout's Rest, of Comanche, of Aunt Lou, of Uncle Bill, and of Slash, so Ma and Ben would know what they were like. I got out the green carpet-bag and started to pack it, but Aunt Lou took over and did that for me.

We took the carryall into town, and Aunt Lou and I rode on the back seat while Uncle Bill drove and talked to Colonel Judson on the front seat. The trip didn't take long. Uncle Bill kept the horses at a good, steady pace.



I drew a lot of quick pictures of Uncle Bill.

We left Aunt Louisa with friends in North Platte and the team and rig at the livery stable. We had an hour and a half before our train left. Uncle Bill said, "You stay close around the station, Dan, so yuh don't miss the train. The Colonel and I have a little business t'take care of. We'll be back before the train comes."

Well, they were, but they didn't have much time to spare. Uncle Bill's face was kind of pink.

Everyone on the car we got on turned to look at Uncle Bill. Some of them came up and asked could they shake hands with Buffalo Bill. Pretty soon they were coming in from the other cars to shake his hand.

Before we got into Omaha, Uncle Bill pushed his hair up on top of his head and put lady's hairpins in it. Then he put his hat on over it and laughed. "Maybe now they won't know who I am," he said.

But they did. People came up to him in the station to look and shake hands, and before long there was a crowd. Uncle Bill laughed good naturedly and joked with them and shook hands with everyone whose hand he could reach.

After a while he started pushing toward the door of the station, with me and Colonel Judson trying not to get separated from him, and the crowd followed right on out into the street. Try as best I could to keep close to him, the people pushed right in ahead of me, and before long I was way back at the fringe of the slowly moving crowd around Uncle Bill.

A boy about twelve said excitedly, " 'Ja see 'im, kid? 'Ja see Buffalo Bill? Come on, I'll help you get up close. Maybe he'll shake hands with us!"

"I saw him," I said. "I'm with him."

The boy laughed. "Quit joshin'," he said. "I ain't no greenhorn. Yuh can't make me believe yuh knows Buffalo Bill!"

"I live with him," I said. "We jus' came in on the train."

"Go tell it to Sweeney!" the boy said and laughed as hard as he could.

Well, in a couple of minutes Colonel Judson came looking for me. "Ah! here you are, Dan!" he said. "I was afraid the crowd would trample you or something. Come on, we'll go on to the hotel and wait for Bill there."

The boy grasped his arm. "Look, mister," he said, his eyes wide, "yuh mean this kid knows Buffalo Bill?"

Colonel Judson laughed. "He sure does, son," he said. "He's Buffalo Bill's ward."

"Gosh!" the boy exclaimed. "Gosh! *He does live with him!*"

I enjoyed his amazement. "Come up to the hotel," I said, "and maybe you can shake hands with Uncle Bill there."

So he came with Colonel Judson and me, and pretty soon Uncle Bill did come and shake his hand. When the boy left he whispered to me, "You're sure lucky, kid!"

The next day we caught the Chicago train. This one had real comfortable seats, and when night came a Negro porter made them up into beds.

Uncle Bill had some bottles in his suitcase, and he kept one around most of the time. But he and Colonel Judson didn't sing or tell frontier stories. They were pretty serious. I heard Uncle Bill say once, "Digging those irrigation ditches in the Big Horns has sure put me in a big hole, Judson. Yuh wouldn't believe the money it's cost me. An' that ain't all. Buildin' the

Irma Hotel and gettin' the TE started has cost me big money too."

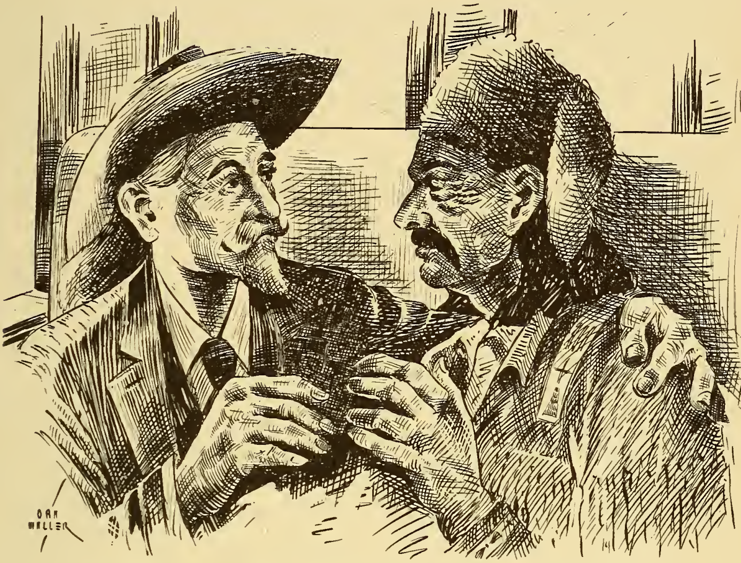
I had learned from Aunt Lou and from hearing Mr. Salsbury and Uncle Bill talk about it, that Uncle Bill had long been interested in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming. In 1894 he had bought a lot of property there. He organized the Shoshone Land and Irrigation Company which secured several hundred thousand acres of land not far from the entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Uncle Bill saw a tremendous future for the area. He envisioned people trooping there, foresaw the Big Horn Basin dotted with farms and interlaced with railroads, even imagined a great city growing up there. Since there was not enough rainfall for crops, the one thing needed was irrigation. He would supply that. He would be a developer of civilization. He had started an irrigation program that would use the waters of the Shoshone. With the building of a hotel as a start, he had founded the town of Cody which by now had a population of about a thousand. His TE ranch was forty miles from Cody.

But the irrigation project had been under way for some time, had cost an enormous sum of money, and seemed now no nearer to bringing water to the farms of the Big Horns than when he had started.

Mr. Salsbury had visited the project. His report to Uncle Bill had been discouraging. The project was too big for one man, Mr. Salsbury said. Besides, the people who were doing the work were cheating Uncle Bill. Not half the men on the payroll were turning in a good day's work.

As a result of Mr. Salsbury's report, Uncle Bill had discharged a lot of men. But he believed in the Big

Horns. And anyone who wanted a job had only to agree to go and work there to be hired. Uncle Bill thought when he put his sister, May Decker, and her husband in charge of his Big Horns project, that it would develop cheaply and fast. It didn't.



"That's a shame, Cody," Colonel Judson said. "But your show's a real money maker."

"Seems that the Big Horns need more and more money all the time," Uncle Bill went on. "Sometimes I think those guys up there are usin' my shovels t'bury my money with instead of diggin' ditches. I'm up t'my neck in debt an' the Lord only knows how I can crawl out."

"That's a shame, Cody," Colonel Judson said. "But your show's a real money maker. If you watch things a bit you ought to make out all right."

Uncle Bill took a big drink out of his bottle, wiped his moustache and lips with the back of his hand, and pushed the cork down in the bottle again. "If only I'd borrowed money from somebody besides Bailey, I wouldn't feel so uneasy. Barnum an' Bailey don't like my show. It draws more crowds than their circus . . . Sometimes I stay awake nights a-wonderin' if the reason Bailey was so willin' to lend me money wasn't 'cause he wanted to get a-hold on Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show."

Colonel Judson reached over and took the bottle from Uncle Bill's hand. "Don't worry too much, Bill. Sit tight and keep an eye on things. You'll make out."

When we got to Chicago Uncle Bill put me on the New York train. "So long, Dan," he said. "Yuh be a good boy. If yuh get lost, why show a policeman that envelope I put in yuhr pocket and he'll see yuh get t'yuhr Ma all right. Remember t'give the redcap and the cabman a quarter for a tip. I'll be seein' yuh soon. In jus' a month the show'll open in Madison Square Garden. I'll come an' get yuh and yuhr Ma and put yuh in the best seats in the house. Then we'll talk 'bout when yuh should come back t'Scout's Rest. Goodbye, boy." He thrust out his big hand to me.

"Goodbye, Uncle Bill," I said very solemnly.

He clapped me on the shoulder and left.

Well, I was used to riding on trains now, and nothing out of the ordinary happened on the trip to New York. When I got there a redcap picked up my bag and took me out to the street and got a hansom for me. I gave him a quarter like Uncle Bill told me to.

We went a long way, and it was slow, too, winding in and out of the traffic of horse-drawn trucks and rigs and the cable cars. Finally I was set down in front of a tenement building in what I later learned was the East Side. A crowd gathered around the cab when it stopped. I guess they weren't used to hansoms in that street. I sure was glad when I saw Ma easing her way into the crowd. I yelled, "Ma!" at her, and she almost pushed over a big fat Irish woman to get to me.

I paid the cabman and gave him the tip out of the money Uncle Bill had given me, and Ma led me up three flights of dirty stairs to her flat. Ben was up there and he was sure glad to see me. Just as glad, I guess, as I was to see him. I hugged the little guy. "You've grown some," I said.

Ma said, "You too, Dan!" And we all hugged each other again.

CHAPTER 8

A Young Cowboy at Sea

IT WAS a year and a half later before I was again driving out to Scout's Rest with Mr. Standish, the station agent. A lot had happened in that long time. Now I was eleven, coming twelve. In all that long period I hadn't seen either Aunt Louisa or Uncle Bill. But I'd spent a considerable period on the streets of New York, gone to Germany in the steerage of the "Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse," visited my grandmother in Bremerhaven, seen my Ma remarried, and had come back to New York as the stepson of a man who could not speak English.

When I got to New York from Scout's Rest, Ma wasn't well. To make ends meet she had needed to take in sewing. Ben had had typhoid fever and it had left him weak and with running ears, so that he had to be taken to a doctor regularly for treatment. Ma worked so hard that shortly after I got there she got sick, and the doctor said she should go on a sea voyage.

She got the small sum we needed from her sister's husband, a part repayment of a loan Ma had made him just after Pa had been killed. Since he could give her so little the passage had to be by steerage. And down there I'm quite sure Ma got little of the sea air that was one of the purposes of the voyage.

In Bremerhaven we stayed with my widowed grandmother, who was in the wool business left her by my grandfather. I didn't have much experience to base such a judgment on, but I think that she was probably in moderately comfortable circumstances.

One of the men who visited the house in connection with that business became interested in Ma, and within four months she had married him and we were on our way back to New York. My stepfather was convinced that the opportunities in the new country were greater than in Germany.

Ma, I'm now sure, had married him not so much for love—though I'm also sure that she didn't dislike him—as she had to make a home for Ben and me. The way I figure it out now she thought that, with a husband, she could keep Ben and me together as a family—that I wouldn't be more than two thousand miles away.

Although my stepfather realized that the streets of New York were not paved with gold, he had the conviction that gaining wealth was little more than a matter of being in America, that land of plenty. But for more than a month after our arrival in New York he'd been unable to find a job. I will say he wasn't proud or lazy.

Although he'd been a clerk in Germany and so definitely above physical labor, he got himself a job delivering coal and often had to carry it up to third-floor and higher tenements. Slowly he picked up the new tongue and managed to put aside a little out of his small earnings. Before the year was out he had managed to get his own horse and wagon.

My stepfather adjusted to New York City life far better than I. The tall tenements and narrow streets seemed to close up around my throat and choke me. I didn't like New York. I didn't like any town. I wanted the freedom of wide horizons. I wanted to be able to see the high spread of a black vulture's wings, hesitant over some decaying prize. I wanted to feel the rippling steel muscles of a horse under my knee, to hear the mournful bellering of cattle over the range, to smell the sagebrush.

Ma had written to Uncle Bill when we left Germany, and I presume she wrote him again when we came back; and this time she probably told him that she had reestablished a home and would keep me with her. But my distaste for New York was obvious. It was never abated by the long discussions Ma had with me about it. She was disturbed, too, by a couple of small escapades that an Irish youngster named Mickey and I had engaged in. So she wrote to Uncle Bill again. His answering letter, enclosing the fare for my return to Scout's Rest, was prompt.

In spite of my very real love for Ma I was glad to be going back to the spaces unspoiled by man's putrefying works. And my wish to go back was bolstered by the conviction that my stepfather would take very good care of Ma and Ben.

Aunt Louisa came out of the house as soon as the buckboard came into the yard. I ran to her and she gave me a big hug that squeezed the breath out of me and pulled me off my feet.

"Dan," she said when she released me, "you've grown a lot."

"Yes'm," I said. "But you look the same, Aunt Lou."

"You're a darling!" she smiled. "And I'm glad you're back at Scout's Rest. I missed you this last year and a half, Dan. Missed you more than I thought I would."

"I missed you too, Aunt Louisa," I said very earnestly.

"Go on!" she said with a laugh, but she patted my shoulder with her hand. "You missed my bread and jelly, that's what you missed, young man."

She hugged me again. Then she turned to Mr. Standish. "Give your horses a rest, Mr. Standish, and come in and have a bite to eat."

"Thank you, Miz Cody. The hosses can stand a bait and I kinda think I could myself."

I carried my green carpetbag into my room and then went out to the kitchen where Aunt Louisa was frying some bacon and eggs for Mr. Standish.

"Dan," she said, "we'll be eating supper within another two hours, you and I. Irma's away and your Uncle Bill won't be home for a week or two. You go take a nap so you can stay up and tell me all about your trip to New York and Germany, and your mother and Ben and your new father."

It was just like old times again. I didn't wake up until Aunt Lou called me for supper.

It was sure good to sit down to a ranch meal again where there were no smells of a thousand other people's dinners; where the air was clean and smelled only of clean things like the cottonwoods, the hay in the barns, and the sage-brush; where there was no clang of street cars, no voices raised in family quarrel, nor the shrill disagreement of the East Side's too many children.

I put down my spoon after I'd put away the last bite of the apple pie Aunt Lou had made. "Gosh," I said, "that was good!"

"Thank you, Dan," Aunt Lou said. She pushed her plate forward, poured herself another cup of coffee, and rested her elbows on the table. "Now tell me about New York."

"It's big," I said, "and heaps noisy. People are always around you. Things smell. The streets between the tall buildings are like canyons that the sun never reaches — but it smells worse. When you cook you use gas. And if your quarter in the meter runs out, you have to hunt around in the dark for another and then put it in the meter before you get your lights and stoves to working again. All the sidewalks are cement. And when you walk your feet get tired from the hard cement. I didn't like it.

"Tell me about your mother."

"She's fine now. My new pa takes good care of her and Ben."

"Did you like Europe?"

"No'm," I answered. "The people can't talk English."

Aunt Lou laughed. "I 'spect not," she said. "What else didn't you like?"

"The boys're different. They're stiff and quiet when grown-ups are around. They're afraid of 'em. And when they ain't any grown-ups they play queer kinds of games."

"Your mother got married over there? Tell me about her husband."

"He's all right," I told her. "But he couldn't talk English either. He's learnin' now, though. He's got a little business started deliverin' coal."

"And Ben?"

"He's kind of weakly. Ma says it was those winters on the Cross-Up. But he was better when I left. Ma was better too."

"That's fine," Aunt Lou said. "You don't need to worry about them now."

"No'm," I said. "They're gettin' along jus' fine."

"Now tell me what you did in New York. Did you go to school?"

"Ma wanted me to, but I didn't want to. Those schools are big. Thousands of kids in every one. And there ain't one of 'em that knows how t'hitch up a hoss. They don't know the difference between 'gee' and 'haw.' I told Ma if I had t'go t'school I'd rather go out here."

"What did you do with your time then?"

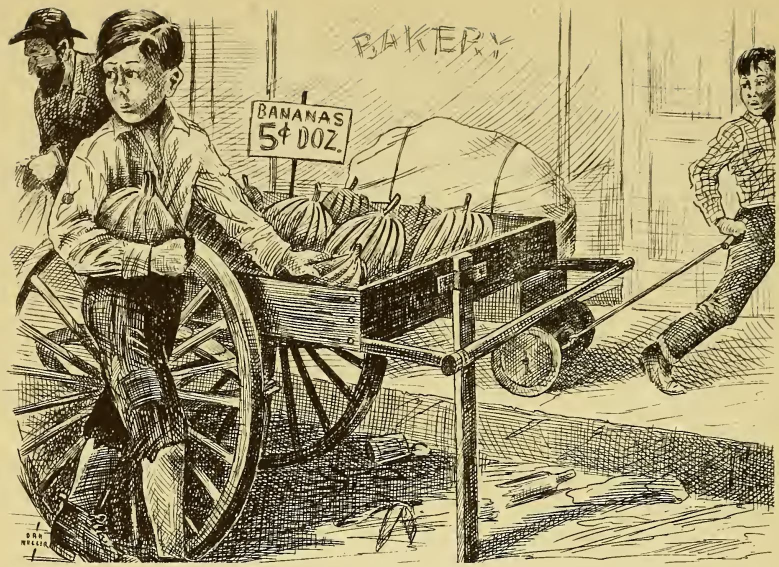
"I rode on the elevated some. The Allen street line. They had steam engines on that one. And if you didn't get off the car you could ride from one end of the line to the other as many times as you wanted without paying another fare. Sometimes I rode all day."

"What else did you do?"

"I played around with an Irish kid named Mick. He didn't go t'school either. His Ma was a washwoman. Sometimes we'd take his wagon and deliver some wash. Mick was pretty good at swipin' things off the push carts."

"Dan! You didn't steal?"

I looked down at my empty pie plate. "Naw, not really. I just pulled the wagon, same as what a hoss would."



"Mick was pretty good at swipin' things off the push carts."

She still looked upset. "What did your mother say?"

"She didn't know," I said, still keeping my eyes on the pie plate. "But seems she was kinda worried about Mick and me. I think maybe 'cause of Mick she was willin' t'let me come out t'Scout's Rest again."

"Yes," Aunt Louisa said, "I don't wonder."

I looked down at my plate. I had an idea that Aunt Lou disapproved of my helping Mick. I made up my mind I wouldn't tell her of any of the other things Mick and I had done. She might stop liking me.

"When will Uncle Bill be back?" I asked.

"You know Will Cody!" Aunt Lou said. "The show closed a week ago. He may be here yet tonight, or he might not come for another two weeks or more."

"Gosh, I hope he comes soon," I said.

Aunt Lou sort of half-smiled, as if she wasn't sure she had something to smile about. "I hope so, too. After all this time I find myself still hoping — "

"What, Aunt Lou?"

"Why — why, just that he would stay at home like the other men folk. We might be happy, too." She sighed and her shoulders shrugged the littlest bit. "He belongs to everyone — but not to me."

In spite of getting back to Scout's Rest where I'd wanted to be so much over the past year and a half, I went to bed a little sad. *Why couldn't a fine lady like Aunt Lou get along with such a swell person as the great Buffalo Bill?*

CHAPTER 9

Uncle Bill and I Shake on It

AUNT LOU didn't say anything about school for three days. She let me get reacquainted with Comanche, talk with Slash Stacey, and meet the old hands and the new ones who'd come since I went away. Everything was much the same. But on Saturday night she said:

"Dan, you make sure you're ready to go to school Monday."

I was drawing a picture of her rolling out some piecrust for Sunday dinner. I stopped. "Awww," I said. "Do I hafta, Aunt Lou?"

"You sure do, young man. What do you think Will would say when he comes home if he found you was just lazying around when school has already started?"

"Nothin'. I don't think he'd say nothin' at all."

"You better think again."

So Monday I rode back to school again. Lonnie wasn't there any more, and two of the older boys were gone too. But Miss Purdy was there. She didn't seem surprised to see me.

"Well, Dan," she greeted. "I suppose you've learned a great deal since you've been gone."

"Yes'm," I said.

"Fine," she said. "Where did you go to school?"

She wasn't going to like what I had to tell her, I thought, and sure enough her mouth tightened when I said: "I was too busy to go to school, Miss Purdy. I went to New York, and then to Germany, and then back to New York. I just got here 'bout a week ago."

"You mean you still can't read!"

"Yes'm — No'm — I mean I can't read very well."

"We'll find out," she promised. And she did. Again I was put with the youngest children. I sure didn't like that.

Uncle Bill came home the next Sunday. He had guests with him again. There was General Miles, Mr. Salsbury, and Johnny Baker. I'd met them all except General Miles and it was nice to see them again.

We had a grand time that evening. Aunt Lou had a big dinner for all of them, and they stayed around the table for a long time, eating, telling stories, drinking lots of coffee — Aunt Lou made three potfulls.

Uncle Bill called me into the dining room. "Are you glad to be back to ol' Scout's Rest, Dan?" he asked, pulling me up against his knee.

"I sure am, sir," I said, grinning.

"Well, we sure are glad to have yuh back, Dan boy.

I missed havin' yuh 'round to draw yuhr pictures. Ol' Comanche missed yuh too. Seemed t' me like he couldn't properly eat for more'n a month after yuh left. So don't yuh go a-pinin' to leave us again in a hurry."

"Nosir," I said.

"That's what I wanta hear!" he said. "Now I was tellin' Mr. Salsbury you was the best drawer of hosses I'd ever seen. An' when I tol' him yuh was only twelve, he didn't believe me. So I layed a little bet that yuh could draw a pitcher of Comanche that would eat hay. Can yuh do that for yuhr Uncle Bill? Near time I was winnin' a bet from ol' Salsbury. He keeps me eatin' humble pie most all the time."

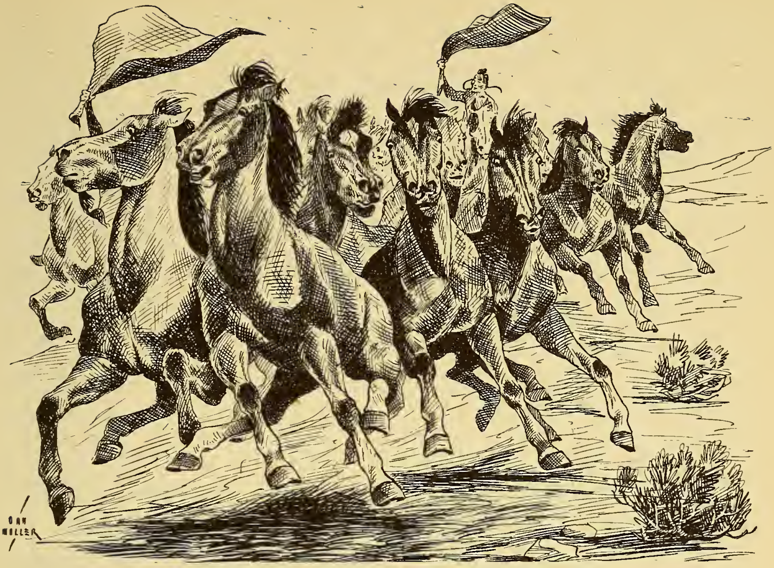
I was a little scared. "I'll try, Uncle Bill. But I ain't so awful good."

"You see!" Mr. Salsbury waved his cigar triumphantly. "You're bound to lose this bet too, Bill!"

"We'll show yuh, yuh ol' goat! Dan, yuh go get yuhr tools an' we'll clear a spot right here on the table so's he can see while he's losin' the bet."

So I got drawing paper and pencils and came back to the dining room. They'd cleared off a spot for me between Uncle Bill and Johnny Baker. I'd grown in the past two years, and I didn't need now to sit on anyone's knee to draw my picture. I thought for a little bit before I started. Uncle Bill had just started a story.

"You there, Johnny, yuh're the best show rifleman in the business. An' given a chance in the ol' days I ain't sayin' yuh wouldn't of shot with the best of 'em — Alf Slade er any other man. But I'd like t' tell yuh a story Colonel Judson wrote 'bout me under his writin' name of Ned Buntline. I ain't sayin' it's true, nor I ain't sayin' it ain't true. But it sure is a good story.



"Raidin' Injuns ran off some hosses belongin' t'some nearby ranchers."

"I was scoutin' for the army outa Fort McPherson in the spring o' 1870 when raidin' Injuns ran off some hosses belongin' t'some nearby ranchers and even gathered in some fifty head from the McPherson herd. My favorite pony, Powder Face, was with the guv'ment hosses they took. The general ordered me t'scout for the troop o' sojers he sent out under a lieutenant. I selected Buckskin Joe as my mount. Buckskin was the finest trail pony in the West — he sho' was a lot o' hossflesh!

"I got out in front and 'fore long had the Injuns' trail. I rode fast 'nough so that I even seen 'em kill a couple o' hosswranglers.

"The general had given the lieutenant jus' one order: 'Follow Cody.'

"So the looie led his troop after me. 'Fore long I could tell the Injuns was circlin' their stolen hosses to throw us off the trail. We kept after them till the next mornin'. I figured they'd head one way and s'gests to the lieutenant that we try t'shortcut an' head 'em off. He was 'greeable. But after we'd ridden a half day I discovers I'm wrong an' the Injuns has given us the slip. I was sure now the Injuns was headed fer Red Willow Creek.

"Well, those sojers had come in a hurry an' they didn't have sufficient clothes to combat the chill night air nor any rations whatsoever. It was impossible for 'em t'make the thirty-five miles t'Red Willow Creek without food or water. Already they'd been forty hours without food and twelve without water.

"'Course, bein' a scout, I was 'customed t'hardships an' blotted trails."

Uncle Bill paused so that the men intent on his tale could appreciate the dangers and the fortitude demanded by the situation. He took a drink, wiped the back of his hand slowly across his moustache and mouth.

"Well," he went on, "I s'gests to the lieutenant that the men be given a rest. I would return for 'em when I found the redskins."

Uncle Bill paused again. Then he went on:

"I found the Injuns at the Creek. I eased back to my hoss and pushed him, tired as we both was, on a run for the sojers.

"The lieutenant and I holds a council of strategy, and followin' my plan we rode up t' within a quarter mile o' the redskins, after which we sneaked up on foot, Injun fashion. When everyone had had time t'get in position we charged 'em.

"Them Injuns was sure surprised. Everythin' was confusion. The Injuns scattered an' the sojers after 'em. I kept a special lookout for my pony Powder Face.

"All at once I saw 'im. An Injun was on his back. I ran back an' got Buckskin Joe an' followed as fast as the tired hoss could make it. Powder Face, bein' not only fast but fresh, was outdistancin' Buckskin Joe's best efforts when the Injun atop Powder Face slowed t'let another Injun jump on behind him.

"Poor ol' Buckskin Joe. I urged him after, knowin' that Powder Face's havin' a double load would give us a chance of overtakin' him. I was right. Slowly we was catchin' up. I was afraid t'shoot, 'fraid I'd hit Powder Face. We followed for a couple o' miles or so, slowly pickin' up ground.

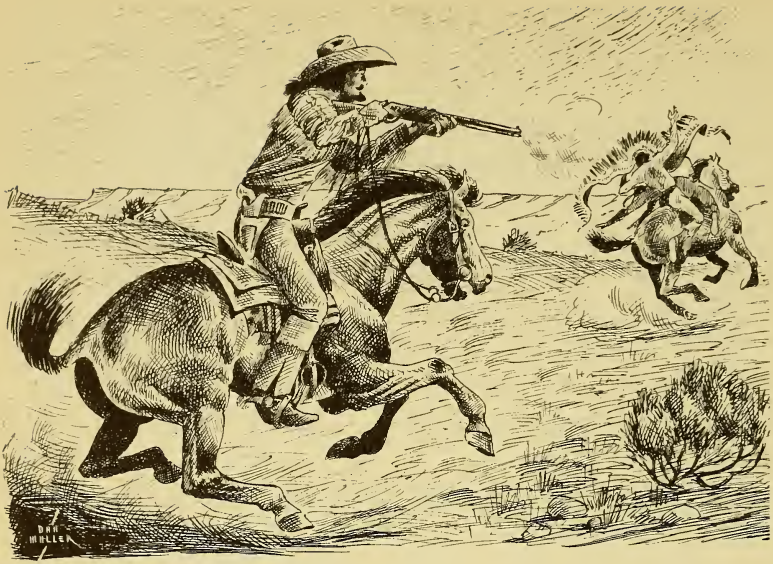
"It was gettin' daylight now. The rear Injun on Powder Face turned 'round and tried t'pot me with a revolver. I wasn't afraid. I didn't think he could come near me from the angle he had t'shoot.

"Gradually I was gettin' nearer an' nearer. Then I was close enough."

Uncle Bill paused to let us catch the full drama of his story.

"I pulled up my trusty rifle and leveled it. In spite o' bein' tired, ol' Buckskin Joe was in smooth motion. Well, sir, I was aimin' t'make a trick shot an' I did. Yessir, I did. My bullet hit the rear Injun, went through him, an' into the one in front, killin' both of 'em stone dead."

Uncle Bill paused again, enjoying the concentration we all bent upon him. "Well sir," he ended, "those two Injuns pervided me with two o' the finest war bonnets I have in my collection. Yuh betcha!"



"My bullet hit the rear Injun, went through him, and into the one in front."

Johnny Baker chuckled, "That was sure shootin', Colonel." General Miles and Mr. Salsbury shouted their hearty admiration too.

The men drew their elbows off the table and settled back in their chairs. The bottle passed around. I bent again to my drawing so that I might finish it before Aunt Lou would send me to bed.

Uncle Bill looked over my shoulder. "I'll stand by my bet, Dan. That's a mighty fine pitcher. Take a look here Nate an' then fork over yuhr money, for yuh lose fair and square."

Mr. Salsbury came around the table and bent with Uncle Bill over my shoulder. "By golly, you're right, Bill," he admitted. "That's a good drawing of a horse. Within another two-three years we'll have this young man doing all our art work for the Show regularly."

A couple of days later when I rode into the yard from school Uncle Bill hailed me. "Howdy, Dan," he said. "I was waitin for yuh. I thought you and me would have a little pow-wow."

I slid off Comanche's back in a hurry.

"Take care of yuhr hoss, Dan. A good cowman takes care of his stock first. I can talk while yuhr workin' on Comanche."

He followed me out to the barn.

"I was thinkin', Dan," he began, "that maybe one o' the reasons yuh got homesick for yuhr Ma the last time, was 'cause yuh didn't have 'nough t'do. It seems t'me a boy needs to have some reg'lar work t'do. So I thought maybe I'd have yuh do a little work 'round the barns. I don't want yuh t'work too hard, y'understand. An' we can get along without yuhr work if yuh don't wanna help. An' I don't want yuh to neglect yuhr school work or yuhr drawin'. But if yuh would lend Slash a hand with his work in the barn an' oilin' harness an' one thing an' another, why I'd be almighty pleased. What d'yuh say?"

"You mean I can be a hand 'round the place, Uncle Bill? Gosh, I'd like to! I'd like t'learn a lot 'bout hosses and how to care for 'em, an' break em, an' — an' everythin'."

"Fine! Fine!" Uncle Bill said. "An since yuh'll be doin' a hand's work — or least some of his work — why I'll pay yuh for the time yuh put in."

"You've done enough for me already," I said. Being twelve now, I realized in some measure just how much Uncle Bill and Aunt Lou were doing for me.

"That's good hearin'," Uncle Bill said and laughed in a pleased fashion. "But yuh let me be the boss and tell yuh what I'll do. I'll pay yuh a wage, Dan. I'll pay yuh what yuh're worth an' no more nor no less. Is it a deal?"

"Yuh betcha!" I said.

We shook hands solemnly. "Now a couple more things, Dan. I been wonderin' if yuh couldn't do me a drawin' in color o' the Scout's Rest spread. I'd be mighty pleased t'have it. Would yuh like t'do that?"

"I'll try, sir," I said. "Course I ain't so very good."

"Well, you draw it an' we'll see. Now another thing. Yuh're twelve now, an' pretty handy at takin' care o' yuhrself. Still yuh're pretty young too. I don't think yuh could be a lot o' help with the Show. But on the other hand yuh could maybe be useful here and there, and yuh'd get in trainin' for really doin' a job in another year or two. We open in Madison Square Garden in May, so yuh could see yuhr Ma and brother again. D'yuh wanna go on tour with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show next summer?"

"Gosh!" I said. *"Goshhhhhhh!"*

Uncle Bill grinned down at me from his height way above Comanche's shoulder. "I guess that means yuh would like t'come with the show. Well, we'll plan on it then."

He winked at me and turned and walked out of the barn, bellowing a good-natured greeting to Slash, who was at the far end busy with Brown Jug, Uncle Bill's favorite mount. He walked down the wooden ramp to the yard.

Then I woke up. I ran after him shouting, "Uncle Bill! Uncle Bill!"

He waited.

"Well, change yuhr mind, Dan?" He grinned through his moustache.

"Nosir," I said. "I wanted to say thank you — thank you a lot."

"Good boy!" he said. He patted my shoulder. "Yuh're welcome, Dan."

Well, from then on I measured all time in relation to when the Show would open in Madison Square Garden. I didn't mind school nearly so much, and I guess maybe I even learned some things. At least I got so I could read pretty good, and Miss Purdy took me out of the class with the littlest youngsters and put me up with the next to littlest, who were still a lot smaller than me.

She told me to do a colored crayon drawing on the blackboard for Thanksgiving, and I planned it from a story she'd read us about the *Mayflower*. Miss Purdy liked it and left it on the board for two weeks after Thanksgiving was over. Then she had me start on a Christmas drawing. I think she had doubts while I was drawing that one. I had Santa Claus riding a buckboard, a big bag of gifts in the back, with six broncs a-pulling it. Santa Claus was a cowhand, dressed in chaps and all, but kind of fat and wearing Santa Claus whiskers. I spent more than three days on each of the drawings and got excused from doing school work!

It was after Christmas before I finished the colored picture of the Scout's Rest spread. Aunt Louisa was the only one who saw it before it was done, and I let her see it because she always had good suggestions. Uncle Bill liked it as much as I had hoped he would. The next time he went into North Platte he had it framed. When he brought it back he hung it over the fireplace in the parlor.

But in spite of being so busy with the drawing and school and enjoying my new work in the barns, the time to start out with the Show seemed awful far away. And then, surprisingly, the snow began to melt, and a brown node of earth sticking out of the snow's remnants showed a faint greening, and Aunt Lou was scolding me for tracking mud into her kitchen.

All of a sudden time was flying, for there remained so many things to do. The guests left and no new ones came. Aunt Louisa hid all of Uncle Bill's bottles, and he didn't protest too much because he knew he had to get in good physical shape for the start of the Show.

And then it was time to leave.

Chapter
10

I Become a Trouper

Uncle bill, Johnny Baker, and I traveled together to New York, where the Show had been gathered for its opening. We had attracted a lot of attention when Uncle Bill, Colonel Judson, and I had come to Chicago together more than two years before, but this time we attracted even more. On the train there were folks around us all the time, eager to shake Uncle Bill's hand and talk to him and Johnny Baker.

One of the reasons for this was that we were dressed for the Show. Uncle Bill didn't pin his hair up under his Stetson but let the long locks fall about his shoulders. His moustache and goatee were perfectly trimmed, and his florid complexion showed through them as the pink of abounding vitality. He wore a gray frock coat and gray pants and high-heeled boots. His necktie, fitting around a loose, rolling collar, filled out the picture very well.

Except for the moustache and goatee and the long hair, Johnny Baker was dressed much the same. Even I was dressed for display. Aunt Lou had cut down one of Uncle Bill's bright red woolen shirts to fit me. Below this Uncle Bill had fitted me out with brand-new levis and high-heeled boots. And he'd bought me a black Stetson that must have left my face hidden in shadow.

Uncle Bill loved to have the people crowding around him. He would genially and expansively say to them as they called questions to him, "Well, folks, I can't answer all yuhr questions here. Yuh must come and see the Show. The Old Wild West is there — all of it crowded in two hours of the fastest action ever seen by the human eye, and all of it true as the Gospel. There ain't nothin' in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show that didn't happen sometime during the great history of the West. It's the biggest Show on earth. If yuh can't come t'New York t'see it, well, we ain't goin' t'stay there but three weeks. Then we're tourin' the country, and we'll come near 'nough so yuh can see us close t'home."

It was like that all the way to New York. Even after we were in our bunks at night, nosey folks would try to get Uncle Bill's attention. He never seemed to mind.

In New York Uncle Bill didn't have much time for me. While the acts were again rehearsed, I wandered about old Madison Square Garden. It was a thrilling sight for anyone, and for a boy who'd been reared on an isolated ranch, it was all but unbelievable. My months in New York and Germany had nothing to compare with it.

I stayed with Ma, Ben, and my step-dad while we waited for the show to open. And as you can well believe, I was the celebrity of the neighborhood. Ma kept that red wool shirt clean by washing it at night when I went to bed and ironing it before I went out in the morning. The lads of the neighborhood crowded around me, asking more questions in a minute than I could have answered — had I known all the answers — in a year. They wanted to know about Indians. They asked me if they could shoot Indians if they went to the West . . . I never really appreciated questions like that, having some little Indian blood myself.

Uncle Bill had given Ma a block of tickets for the opening night, and my step-dad, Ben, Ma and me all went together, with me, sure 'nuf duked out in my show outfit.

Uncle Bill had given us the best box in the house. Old Madison Square Garden was jammed to the rafters with the crowd. My step-dad had never before seen anyone in cowboy getup, and he was wide-eyed most of the time.

The show started. The band played a lively opening number. The Grand Entry was on. A group of riders appeared in the swinging spotlight at the scenic entrance. They loped around the arena and pulled up at the far end. While one spotlight held them in its trembling circle, another flashed on the entrance where the group's leader came out fast and circled to the head of his waiting men. One group after another made their appearance in this manner, including cowpunchers, Mexican vaqueros, Russian cossacks, and finally a yelling group of painted Sioux Indians. Their chief, Irontail, made a grand entry in his full feathered war bonnet. His copper face made no sign as he high-tailed it around the arena to take his place at the head of his warriors.

A spotlight now picked up a single rider loping toward the head of the assembled group of riding battalions.

"LADEEZ AND GENTLEMEN," shouted the announcer. "ALLOW ME TO PRE-SENT THE GREATEST SCOUT OF THE OLD WEST. BUF-FA-LO B-I-I-I-L-L-L."

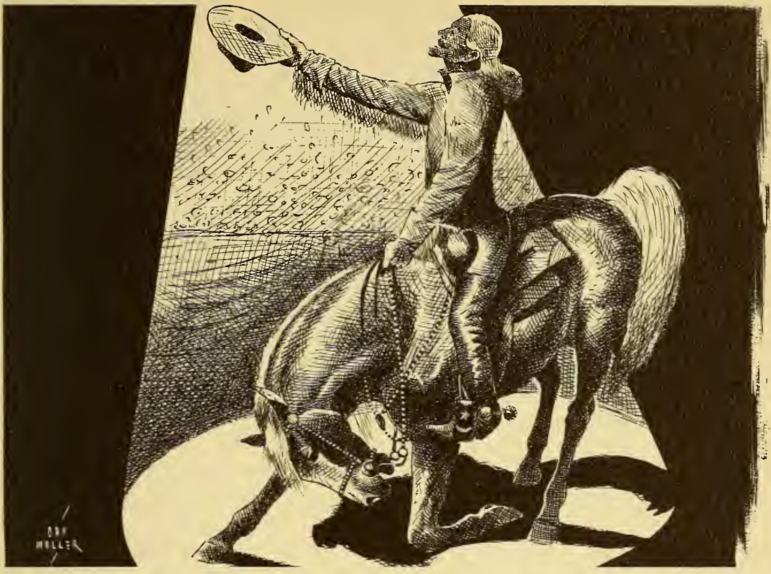
The trumpets of the band burst into a loud blare of sound. By now Uncle Bill had brought his prancing horse to a theatrical stop that set him up on his hind feet. The crowd roared approval. Uncle Bill paid no attention to the tumult of applause until he had set his horse down again. Then he waited for the crowd to quiet before he swept off his now famous Stetson while his horse bent one knee in an elegant bow. This was greeted with lavish applause.

Uncle Bill held up his hand to bring quiet. The last sound murmured away and Uncle Bill's bull-like voice roared throughout the vast arena: "Ladies and Gentlemen. Permit me to introduce to you my Congress of Roughriders of the World."

Once more his horse bowed low and with Uncle Bill smiling and waving his Stetson he slowly backed all the way to the entry.

Later during the show Uncle Bill rode his horse toward the box where Ma, Ben, my step-dad, and I were sitting. He stopped directly in front of us, bowed gallantly. The spotlight showed full on us. I blushed. "I hope you are comfortable," Uncle Bill said.

The eyes of all those thousands of people in Madison Square Garden were on us, and I'm sure they wondered what visiting royalty we might be. Ma gave them no



Then he waited for the crowd to quiet before he swept off his now famous Stetson.

reason to think otherwise. "We are quite comfortable, Colonel Cody," she said grandly and bowed gravely.

Uncle Bill flourished his Stetson again, and the show was on. For more than two hours it sped at a fast pace through one thrilling act after another.

The program was action-packed from the first announcement to the grand closing. About the only quiet part of the Show was when four couples on horseback danced the Virginia Reel. There was a buffalo chase, and Uncle Bill, riding a horse at the loose buffalo's flank, blazed away with a rifle. The rifle held only blanks, of course. There were trick ropers the climax of whose act was dropping a loop over four running horses. Uncle Bill did a marksmanship act where a man riding in front of his horse tossed up glass balls for him to shoot. The two horses had to be in step. Uncle Bill would miss a ball now and then just to make the shooting look harder.

He told me a secret about shooting the glass balls one night in his private car as we rolled along on the way to the next show town. "Shootin' those glass balls ain't really so hard, Dan," he told me. "I could do it with lead bullets if I had to. We used t'do it that way. But we was gettin' so many complaints from the people who lived near the showgrounds that the lead was droppin' through the roofs of their houses, and killin' chickens and such, that we had a special cartridge made that looks like it had a solid slug. The slug ain't solid, though. When the gun goes off the slugs breaks up into little pieces. It's like I was shootin' at the balls with a shotgun." He peered at me with laughter in his blue eyes.

I was taken aback. "But Uncle Bill," I protested, "you *could* hit the glass balls with real bullets."

He clapped me on the shoulder. "I sure could, Dan!"

Johnny Baker did an act of trick shots — such as standing with his back to the target and aiming from a mirror. He even made one shot standing on his head.

Bucking broncs were ridden, the cowboys yelling at the top of their lungs, there was a re-enactment of a ride by a Pony Express Rider, and there were Indian Ghost, Snake, and Wolf dances.

But the one I liked best was the stagecoach chase. In earlier years Uncle Bill had had the original Deadwood coach that was actually held up by highwaymen and Indians many times. But it got so rickety he had to have a new one made. In this act the stagecoach, drawn by six wildly galloping horses, its top crowded with men with rifles and with riflemen poking their weapons through the windows, tore around the arena with Indians mounted bareback in chase. And all the while the stagecoach blazed with the fire of the rifles and the Indians fired back. It sure was exciting.

The Show played for three weeks at the Garden, then moved over to Brooklyn for another eight days. We moved to Jersey City, Trenton, and on to the towns that Mr. Salsbury and Major Burke, the press agent, had routed for the season.

I was kind of shy and this, as it happened, brought me the helpful friendship of many of the performers. I would wander among the razorbacks and the canvasmen and watch them work. I was particularly attracted by the circle about a stake being driven into the ground. The heavy sledges raised and swung sharply down in an accurate rhythm. I wondered what would befall the man holding the stake if their aim was ever poor. But I never saw a sledgeman miss a stake.

The Show train had 84 cars and was divided into two sections. The personnel cars, with Uncle Bill's private car, were always in the second section. The first section carried the canvas, seats, cookhouse and dining tent, and the razorback and canvasmen. The razorbacks were the men who drove the stakes, pulled on the ropes that raised the canvas, and did all the rough work. The canvasmen bossed the setting up of the tents and kept the big stretches of canvas in repair. By the time the personnel section got in, the workers in the front section were well on the way to having the Show set up in its new location.

A few of the more important business men were quartered in Uncle Bill's car, called the Cody car. It had a private chef and Jack of all trades. Uncle Bill made me sleep in this car. But all the time he would let me, I was wandering about the show lot, making friends, learning tricks, and, altogether, having the best time of any boy in the world.

We'd pull into the new town, have breakfast, and then start getting everything clean for the big parade. We always had a heavy dinner at noon, and by two o'clock everybody was set for the opening of the afternoon performance.

I liked to hang around the 84-car which the cowboys bunked in. The car had three tiers of bunks, but I don't remember the bunks being slept in much. Whenever I got to go there I found the cowboys in a noisy crap game. And there was always a stud poker game going on. Uncle Bill didn't much like me going to the 84-car, and after a while, he had the cowboys set to chase me out whenever I came around.

The privilege car was a sort of refectory where meal tickets and food and other items could be bought. No gambling was allowed there.

Uncle Bill didn't mind me going to the privilege car or the married performers' cars. But there wasn't much exciting going on there. Everybody lived out of a trunk, and they sure were loaded with things besides clothes. The lids of almost all of the trunks were covered with pictures and press notices. Sometimes a baby would be born to a mother with the Show, and its cradle would be the top tray of its mother's trunk.

The canvas was not a big circus tent. It was just canvas stretched around an open-top circle, and, in the center, the arena stood out under the light of the sun or bloomed with spotlights under the night sky.

Uncle Bill was pretty occupied during the show season. He didn't have much time for stories. The size of the crowd was always a matter of great concern, and he was sombre on those occasions when the rising tiers of seats showed conspicuous empty places.

Mr. Salsbury traveled with us a good bit. When he was there Uncle Bill didn't drink as much as usual. I don't suppose that I was old enough to remember things well, but I'm sure I was aware of the masked discouragement that tinged Uncle Bill's talk about the Show even when he talked to me. And I seem to remember several occasions when Uncle Bill, Major Burke, and Mr. Salsbury in their conferences in the private car seemed to worry about the business.

I knew Mr. Salsbury was worried about Uncle Bill's drinking. I was in the car one night after the Show had closed and the Show train was about to be shunted out onto the main line for our trip to the next scheduled stop. Mr. Salsbury was at the desk, going over a long row of figures, when Uncle Bill came in, dropped heavily into an upholstered chair and called gruffly for Sam to bring him a drink.

Mr. Salsbury took off his glasses and swung in his chair to regard Uncle Bill.

"Bill," he said, "we're not doing so well this season."

Uncle Bill groaned. "I know, Nate. Seems like we run into a storm about every third show. That always cuts down the take. . . . You, Sam! Get my drink here in a hurry."

Sam came running with a glass and handed it to Uncle Bill. Just then the engine hooked onto us, and the jolt caused the glass to slop over on Uncle Bill's knee. "Damn it, Sam, look what yuh're doin'," he said. He raised the glass to his lips and took a deep draught.

"We've run into some bad weather," Mr. Salsbury said, "but that doesn't wholly explain the poor showing.

Our expenses are too high. You know, Bill, I'm getting a little old for this business of traveling around over the country. I think maybe I'll sell out my end of the Show and retire."

Uncle Bill was startled. He emptied his glass in one big gulp. "Yuh can't do that, Nate! What would I do without yuh?"

His concern was very real, and I'm quite sure it was not based altogether on Mr. Salsbury's importance to the business end of the Show. Uncle Bill always spoke of Nate Salsbury with sincere respect and liking.

"Well," Mr. Salsbury said, "you don't seem to be doing so well with me. Maybe you'll do better without me at all."

"Yuh can't do that t'me, Nate," Uncle Bill said. "Look, let's have a drink and talk this over. SAM! Bring Mr. Salsbury and me another drink."

"But I think I will, Bill. Like I said, I'm getting too old for this traipsing around the ends of the country."

Sam brought the two drinks. Uncle Bill took his in his hand and took a mouthful. Mr. Salsbury waved to Sam to place his on the desk. The train started, and a little of the whiskey slopped up over the edge and wetted the corner of the paper of figures Mr. Salsbury had been going over. Fastidiously he took out his handkerchief, dried the edge of the paper and wiped the bit of moisture off the desk.

"I tell you frankly, Bill, one of the things wrong with the show at this moment is that you drink too much."

Uncle Bill looked up, startled. "Now I wouldn't go t'say that, Nate. You know I cut down on the drinkin' a good deal when the Show is travelin'."

"But not enough, Bill. I want to quit the Show business. I should for the sake of my health, if for no other reason. But I hate to leave you in the hole you're in now. You owe money to everybody, Bill. You have that expensive development program going on up in the Big Horns. Scout's Rest isn't paying its own way. And Bailey owns a hell of a lot of the Show's paper. If he was to clamp down on you, you'd have to close, Bill. You know that."

"Yuh're sure right," Uncle Bill admitted sadly. He took a swallow out of his glass.

"Well, you're in deep, Bill. But you're not in so deep you can't wiggle your way out if you'd just be careful. You spend far too much money. Cut down on your development of the Big Horns, try to make Scout's Rest pay its own way, and cut down on what you spend yourself. If you're careful for three years you can get Bailey out of your scalp, and you can breathe easy again."

"Yuh're sure right, Nate," Uncle Bill said. He took another drink. "Jus' seems like I get deeper an' deeper in debt all the while. If yuh was t'leave me, I'd go plumb bust in a season."

"Well, I'll tell you, Bill. I should quit and take care of my health. But if you were to promise to cut down on the spending, if you were to promise to practically cut out your drinking, I would stay around and try to get you out of this mess."

Uncle Bill smiled widely. "That's what I like t'hear, Nate. We've just struck a bad season. Next year we'll bust all records for the Show. You wait an' see. An' you stayin' with it will make all the difference."

"I will stay, Bill — if you make the promises about your spending and drinking I asked for."

"I sure will, Nate."

"I really mean it, Bill. I mean you got to cut down on the spending and the drinking. Not cut down a little, or for just a month. But cut down a lot and for three or four years. Do you agree to that?"

"You know I do, Nate."

"All right. That means cutting your spending at the Big Horns in two. That means limiting yourself to no more than four drinks a day."

Uncle Bill said, "Now yuh don't mean jus' four drinks a day! Why that ain't nothin' at all, Nate. I gotta have a li'l more'n that."

"Four drinks a day," Mr. Salsbury said determinedly.

Uncle Bill looked at him for a minute. His shoulders drooped, then straightened and shrugged. "All right, Nate. If that's the way yuh want it, that's the way it'll be. Four drinks an' no more."

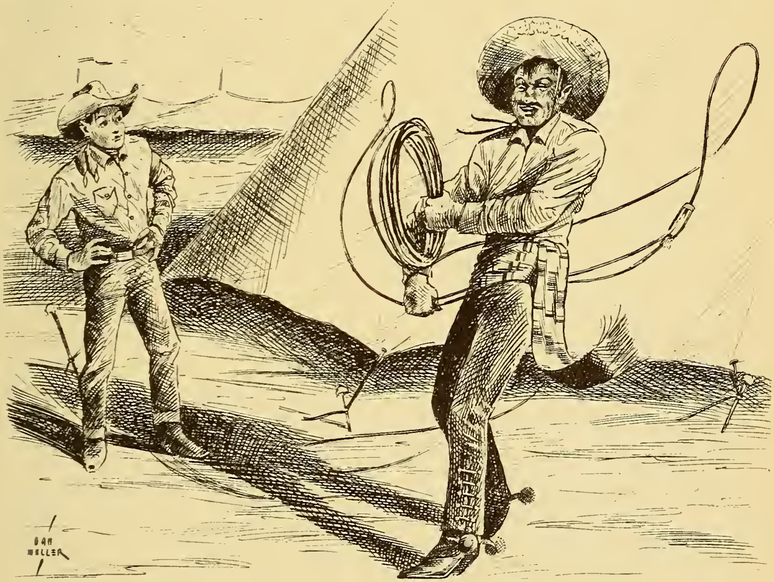
Mr. Salsbury smiled warmly and came over to Uncle Bill and rested a hand on his shoulder. "I hoped you'd see it my way, Bill. We've had a long association since that day we opened in Omaha in 1883. I've made a lot of money, just as you have. But more than that I've liked working with you, Bill. You're often thoughtless and always reckless. But you're nevertheless the finest man I've ever known. You hold up your end of this bargain and I'll stay with you till you're out of debt. Then you ought to retire too, Bill. You've spent a lot of your life pleasing crowds. You ought to retire and just please yourself."

"It sure sounds good t'me, Nate!" Uncle Bill said. He got out of his chair, swayed easily to the rocking motion of the moving train, and held his hand out to Mr. Salsbury. They shook very solemnly and very sincerely.

I did a lot of drawing with the Show. There was so much that was colorful and good picture material. I tried to get too much in, of course, the usual mistake of the young and the beginner. As a consequence the pictures were but indistinguishable jumbles of Show life. I was very disappointed in the results. And since I didn't know what was wrong I began to feel that I couldn't really draw at all. For a time then I stopped altogether.

I made a friend of Orapeso, the top Mexican roper of the Show. Orapeso showed me many little tricks with the reata, and under his coaching my inexpertness smoothed and I became fairly competent. I got so I was able to throw the loop around the moving rear feet of a horse almost at will.

Uncle Bill looked better after he cut down on the drinking. We'd stop in the larger towns and there'd always be people that wanted to take him out to the



Orapeso showed me many little tricks with the reata.

bars and show him off. He often went with them, and almost always wore the spectacular show costume. But he steadily turned down their offer of drinks once he'd had the four allotted in his promise to Mr. Salsbury.

That is he did for more than a week. Then one of the sections of seats collapsed when it was full of people. No one was killed, but there were some bruises, some sprained ankles, and one broken leg. Uncle Bill held himself responsible for this, and since it was before the days when insurance would cover such accidents, he paid the expenses of hospitalization and other damages out of his own pocket.

It was the day after the accident that he called me away from Orapeso's instructions. He looked white and drawn, and the hand he rested on my shoulder shook.

"Dan, boy," he said, when we had drawn away from Orapeso, "yuh heard me promise Nate I wouldn't take but four drinks a day. Now I been thinkin'. It seems t'me a drink is what yuh make it and I didn't agree as t'the size o' the four drinks. Does that there sound reasonable t'yuh?"

If Uncle Bill had asked me to assure him that a calico pony was black I would have agreed. This was less a strain on me than that would have been. I said, "It sure does, Uncle Bill."

"Well, I've been thinkin'. Nate would worry maybe did I make the drinks big in front o' him. So I thinks what could be simpler than if Dan jus' had a bottle 'round. Then when I take a drink I c'n make it whatever size seems t'be right for the occasion. Does that there sound right?"

"Yes'r, but —— "

"I know," he silenced me. "Why don't I jus' slip yuh some foldin' money an' yuh can ask one o' the boys to buy a bottle for yuh. Orapeso, for instance. Would yuh?"

"I sure would!" I told him.

"Yuh jus' keep it under yuhr pillow. Then I c'n get me a drink when I wants it of the size called for."

He slipped some folding money into my breast pocket and walked away to the office wagon. I went back to Orapeso and asked him some questions about caring for my reata. Pretty soon I said to him, "Orapeso, my Ma always tol' me t'have some whiskey for accidents and such. But I don't have any, an' they won't sell any to a boy my age. Would you buy me a bottle I c'n keep for snake-bite?"

Orapeso grinned and winked. "Si, Señor Dan. I weel buy heem."

After that Orapeso bought me an "emergency bottle" every two or three days.

Mr. Salsbury, if he noticed that Uncle Bill was no longer strictly living up to his promise, said nothing about it. During the latter part of the season the seats were better filled, and when we closed the show in October we had had a profitable if not a stupendous season.

CHAPTER
11

Suspicions Start

WHEN the Show closed in October I went back to Scout's Rest with Uncle Bill, Mr. Salsbury, Johnny Baker, and Major Burke. It sure was great to see Aunt Lou again. She had cut down two other red woolen shirts of Uncle Bill's to fit me and she laughed when she found that I was too big to wear them.

I started right in helping Slash about the barns, feeding the chickens, and cleaning the hen houses once a week. When Aunt Lou suggested I ought to start back to school again and got Uncle Bill to say too that it was high time I was getting back to my learning, I countered with the plea that I go to visit Ma in New York for the rest of the winter.

I stayed at Scout's Rest until after Christmas and then went east. I stayed in New York until the show opened at Madison Square Garden in May.

The Show played the Garden for three weeks again, and the seats were full or nearly so every performance. We did have bad luck, however; it left us sad for weeks afterwards.

Duke Graham, one of our best trick riders, whose specialty was jumping to the ground from one side of a running horse to the other, lost his grip on his handhold and crashed head on into one of the biggest retaining poles. He was killed instantly. We buried him in Brooklyn. There wasn't a dry eye among us.

That season was better than last, and Uncle Bill was quite cheerful when we played the last town. Mr. Salsbury was in good humor too. He pretended he didn't know Uncle Bill wasn't living up to his promise to cut down on the drinking.

Almost as soon as we got to Scout's Rest we got word from the Big Horns that Uncle Bill would have to spend another $10,000 on the irrigation project. "Yuh'd think they had some way of findin' out jus' how much loose cash I got t'be taken," he grumbled. But he went to the bank in North Platte and arranged the transfer of the funds.

No one suggested this year that I go to school, and so, since Ma was doing all right in New York with my stepfather, who seemed to become increasingly prosperous, I stayed where I'd rather be — in the open country.

Irma had finished with school and had got married so she wasn't home much. At Scout's Rest we had as many guests as ever.

I don't know whether I was noticing more because I was older, or whether the strain between Aunt Lou and

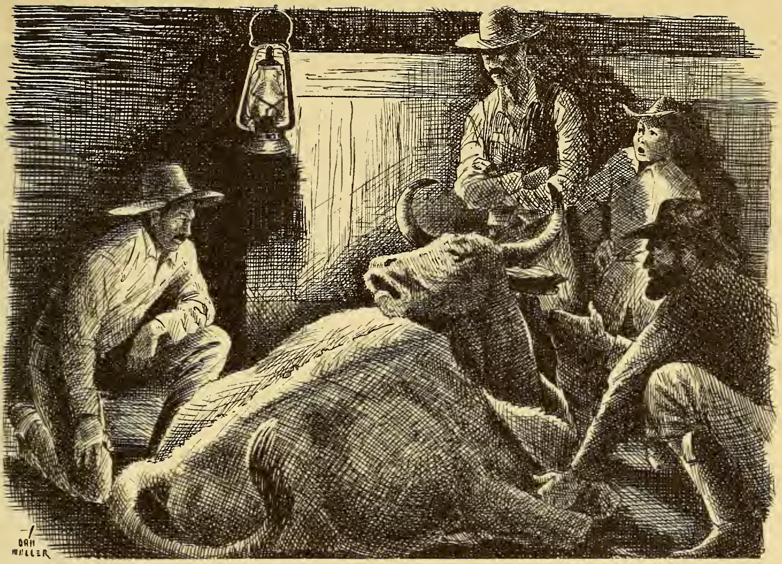
Uncle Bill was greater now. They weren't happy together, and Aunt Lou wasn't happy when he was gone. I didn't pay a lot of notice to their quarrels or their silences with each other, but they were there all the time.

But Uncle Bill wasn't home long. James A. Bailey had arranged for the Show to play Europe the winter of 1902-1903. I wanted to go with the Show, but Uncle Bill thought I was too young. So I stayed at Scout's rest.

I kept busy in the barn a good deal. Slash was a good man with stock and I learned much from him. I remember one occasion when a cow had got herself all bloated up with green alfalfa. Slash was away and didn't get back until late that night. The foreman and I and another of the hands were standing around, not knowing what to do while the poor cow lay on the barn floor and moaned out her pain. The swelling of her belly was enormous.

Slash took one look at her. Then he ran for his quarters. He returned with a big knife and knelt down beside the suffering critter. He thrust the knife deep into the cow's belly about four inches in back of its off front leg. Immediately there came a hissing of escaping gas. It stank something awful. The cow looked relieved immediately, and the next morning it was back on its feet.

We didn't hear of it for several weeks, but just before the Show opened in London, Uncle Bill got word that Mr. Salsbury had died at his home in New Jersey on Christmas Eve. Uncle Bill wanted to cancel the European tour, but the dates were all planned and he couldn't have returned to the United States without suf-



The poor cow lay on the barn floor and moaned out her pain.

fering an immense financial loss. Later he told me what a blow the news had been:

"I couldn't eat hardly anythin' for more than a week," he said. "I'd always depended on Nate Salsbury . . . I've never fooled myself—I'm a good man at raisin' people's interest, but I ain't no business man. Nate Salsbury was the man who made the Show a success. He was with me from the start. Johnny Baker's a good dependable lad. He helps a lot. But now Nate's gone, I don't think I can hold Bailey off my neck much longer."

I didn't believe that. To me Buffalo Bill was the greatest living human. If he wanted to do something, he could, I thought. I didn't worry about what he said. Nor did he, I guess, after a few weeks. Before long he was talking about how great the next winter season in Europe was going to be. He promised that I could go along.

In the summer I spent a month in New York. Ma was fine, Ben was doing well, and my stepfather now owned three coal wagons.

I guess Aunt Lou had been feeling lonely. She was sure glad to see me when I drove into the yard. "I missed you, Dan," she told me, as she walked into the house with an arm across my shoulders.

A few minutes later she called me from my unpacking to the kitchen. She had a piece of one of her thick apple pies and a pitcher of cream on the table. I grinned and fell to with a will.

Aunt Lou smiled as I began to eat. "I see you can still eat any time and any place," she said.

"Yes'm," I said through a mouthful of pie.

"If only your Uncle Bill would do more eating and less drinking." She sighed. "Sometimes I'm afraid of what all that hard liquor is doing to the lining of his stomach. It can't be good for him."

"It don't bother him," I assured her. "He rides jus' as good when he's—when he's been drinkin' as when he ain't had nothin'."

She shook her head. "He's complaining about his food. He's never done that before. If only he wasn't in so many things! He has to make so much money to keep going. If he could only come home to Scout's Rest and just be quiet and contented for a year or two I feel he'd be different."

I was a little concerned. I put down my spoon. "He can't do that, Aunt Lou! Why the season in Europe's all planned!"

She smiled at me. "Dan Muller, you're as bad as he is! All you want is to go gallivanting all over the world and leave poor me out here miles from town. But I swan, I think it'd be better if he rested this winter instead."

"But Aunt Lou, he can't," I cried. "We planned it all already, I'm to fill in on the ridin' an'——"

She waved her hand. "I know, Dan. That would certainly spoil your plans, too. Well, make your mind easy. I have no more chance of persuading Will Cody to quit the Show than I have of growing wings and flying up to heaven right this minute."

I took another bite of pie. "You could come along," I said.

She shook her head. "I tried that. I don't belong with the Show, Dan. I'm just an extra piece of baggage that would get in the way of his other baggage."

I looked quickly up at her face. *What did Aunt Lou mean by "baggage"? Did she know of the things Uncle Bill did while with the Show—the things that I'd just begun to figure out toward the end of the summer?*

I guess she saw the question in my face. "You finish your pie, Dan Muller," she said sharply, "and get out of my kitchen. I got supper for five men to make tonight."

I did a lot more of the work at Scout's Rest that fall while waiting to go to Europe. I was bigger. I could see the things that needed doing, and while I wasn't up to doing all of them, I was able, with Slash Stacey's help, to do a lot of them.

Uncle Bill's foreman wasn't a good one. While the house, the barns, and even the fence posts and the trees near the house were always fresh with whitewash, the fields were not so well taken care of. I began to see what Mr. Salsbury had meant that first year of mine with the Show when he said Scout's Rest could be made to pay its own way.

The horses were well taken care of, but the feeder cattle were not in good shape, and apparently neither the foreman nor any of the hands besides Slash cared whether they ever put on any tallow for the market or not. The harness was not kept up; much of it needed good neatsfoot oil and rubbing down; some of it was even broken and tied together with baling wire. Uncle Bill didn't seem to pay attention to anything but the horses.

I did what I could with Slash Stacey's help. But it was fall and there was little that could be done by a boy in any case. Uncle Bill noticed my efforts and said a good word to me several times about it.

I wasn't neglecting my art, either. I did a better picture of Scout's Rest, and Uncle Bill had it framed and put over the mantle. The other picture he hung in his bedroom. As he looked at the new picture he shook his head. "I ain't sure, Dan, but what we ought t'send yuh t'art school."

The word school frightened me. "I'm doin' all right, Uncle Bill," I told him. "There ain't nothin' they could tell me I don't know. I jus' need t'practice a lot."

"Well, see that yuh do then," he said.

Seemed like the way Uncle Bill kept the house full of company he was afraid to be alone with Aunt Lou. There was only once before we left Scout's Rest for Europe that there weren't guests at the ranch. That once was only a week before we were to start for New York.

Aunt Lou had been down with a cold, but she was up. She fixed our supper and served it in the kitchen. Uncle Bill never liked to eat out there. Aunt Lou, not feeling well, had not prepared a very big meal, and most of it was out of cans. There were beans, some canned salmon, potatoes, and coffee.

Uncle Bill said, "Well, Lou, this ain't one o' yuhr best meals."

"I'm sorry, Will," she said. "Seems I'm still feeling poorly from my cold. But there's enough. We'll have better meals tomorrow."

They didn't say much, and supper was soon over, Uncle Bill only eating some of the fish and beans and drinking two cups of coffee. He left us at the table. I don't care much for salmon, and I don't think Aunt Lou ate any either. Aunt Lou didn't eat much of anything, and I filled up on beans. Then I went out to the barns to help finish up the chores.

When I came back into the kitchen I saw that Aunt Lou had stacked the dishes. I pushed the door open and saw a light under her bedroom door down the hall. I went in the parlor. Uncle Bill was lying all doubled up on the floor.

I ran to him. "Uncle Bill! Uncle Bill!" I cried.

He moaned and pressed his hands tightly against his stomach. "I'm dyin', Dan," he moaned. "That woman has fin'ly done it."

I called for Aunt Lou, and after a minute she came. She hurried over to Uncle Bill and knelt down.

"Yuh've poisoned me, Lou," Uncle Bill said. "Yuh've poisoned me."

"Nonsense," Aunt Lou said. She turned to me. "Dan, you run get Mrs. Knox and Slash. Hurry."

I ran as hard as I could and had them both up there within five minutes.

"Slash," Aunt Lou commanded crisply. "You take the best team and bring the doctor as fast's you can. Mrs.

Knox, you help me get the Colonel to his bedroom. And Dan, you build up the fire on the stove and put on some water to heat. Your Uncle Bill has ptomaine poison, I think."

I built up a roaring fire and had water boiling in just a short time. Aunt Lou came out and got some mustard and water. While she was stirring them together, she said, "I think it was the fish. It must have got contaminated in the can. I hope I'm doing the right thing."

She hurried away with her steaming cup of mustard and water.

Away down the hall I could hear Uncle Bill moaning with pain. I ventured close to his door a couple of times but didn't quite dare to go in. Aunt Lou, I was sure, would order me out, and besides I was frightened of anyone being sick.

The hours went slowly. Aunt Lou and Mrs. Knox hurried back and forth between the kitchen and the bedroom. I kept a good fire burning and lots of kettles full of boiling water.

When the doctor came he went right in to Uncle Bill. He spent quite a little time in there. He came out into the kitchen then. "Well, Mrs. Cody," he smiled, "you've saved the Colonel's life. I'll stay the rest of the night to see if complications set in, but I think he'll be all right. You go to bed. The boy and I will keep each other company, and he can get me anything I'll need. And don't worry," he raised a protesting hand, "I'll call you if he should get worse. You go get a good rest. You need it."

Well, Mrs. Knox went home too. The doctor said that I could let the fire go down. I showed him the dish that contained the uneaten fish. He sniffed at it.

"Smells all right," he said. "But you can't tell about ptomaine. You better get rid of this where no animal can eat it."

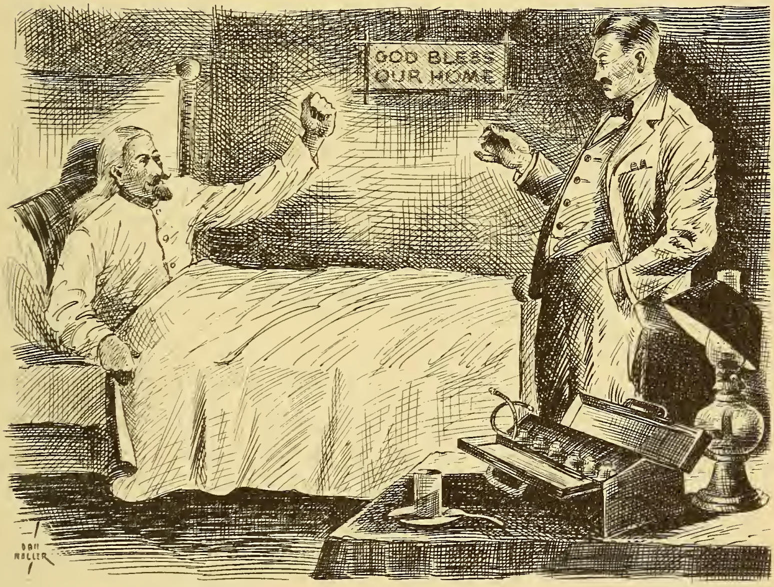
So I took it out to the backhouse and dumped it down the hole. I brought the dish back to the kitchen and washed it at the sink. Then I made the doctor and me a pot of coffee.

Afterwards he told me to go to bed. I sure was ready to. It was after four.

Uncle Bill stayed in bed for three days afterward and the doctor called twice to see him. "You'll be all right, Colonel," the doctor said on his second visit. "You're lucky your wife knew the right thing to do for you."

Uncle Bill said, "Bah! she tried to poison me."

"I'm quite positive she didn't, Colonel. Otherwise



"She poisoned me, I tell yuh!" Uncle Bill shouted, rising on an elbow.

she could simply have let you die instead of doing the things that saved your life."

"She poisoned me, I tell yuh!" Uncle Bill shouted, rising on an elbow. "She nor the boy didn't get sick, did they? Well, why should I if I wasn't poisoned?"

"But neither of them ate any of the fish, Colonel. That's the answer."

Uncle Bill lay back on his pillow and grumbled.

He was weak after he got up. But there was so much to do in getting ready to take the Show to Europe that he was quite busy. Never during the days that remained before we left Scout's Rest did he speak to Aunt Lou.

I'm sure she must have tried to speak to him about what had happened, tried to assure him that she hadn't poisoned him. But he wouldn't speak to her. On the day we left she followed us out to the porch.

She kissed me and patted me on the back. "Goodbye, Dan," she said to me. "Be a good boy and have a good time." She smiled gently. There were tears in her eyes.

"Yes'm," I said and reached down to pick up my suitcase.

"Will Cody," she said then, "I shan't be living here when you get back." She walked into the house and the door closed.

CHAPTER 12

We Show in Europe

I WAS just past fifteen when we got to New York to load Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show aboard the small freight boat for Europe. Naturally I was excited about the trip. I had been only nine when Ma had taken us to Germany, and that trip had been in the steerage of the "Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse." This time we were to go to England, to France, and to Portugal and Spain on the Show's own ship. It seemed to me that all the romance in the world would be mine on this trip.

It was wonderful to watch the horses and steers skittishly climb up the cleated runway to the little ship that would take us across the Atlantic. The buffalo couldn't be led aboard—they had to be raised by the crane, from which a long line was attached to the wide canvas belly straps. The Indians, too, went aboard with some hesitation. But finally the animals, the Mexican vaqueros, the cowboys, the Cossacks, the cowgirls, and everything was aboard. A little tug nudged us away from the pier and out into the stream, where our own screw began to turn. I wondered then how many times it would go around before it had driven us clear to England.

Ma and Ben were on the dock to wave us goodbye, and there were relatives and friends of the performers waving their handkerchiefs alongside Ma.

I was so enthralled with the idea of the trip that I even forgot a little the threat Aunt Lou had voiced as we left Scout's Rest. Uncle Bill hadn't however. He didn't talk to me much about it, but he was pretty grumpy. He had been ever since we'd left Scout's Rest. Later he told me he had done very little drinking in New York. What he had done was to see a firm of lawyers about getting a divorce from Aunt Lou.

The European trip had been planned by James A. Bailey. His motive for getting hold of Uncle Bill's notes had soon come out in the open. It hadn't been altruism. He was interested in having control over his biggest competitor in the show business. It wasn't long before Uncle Bill failed to meet an interest payment on those notes. That, I later learned, happened the year after Mr. Salsbury's death. Bailey insisted then that his own men accompany the show to watch the finances. Next a Bailey man was managing the Show. Bailey, to prevent the Show from competing with his circus, kept Uncle Bill showing in Europe for several years.

The trip to England on that slow little ship took almost a month. Our first show date was in London, where we were to stay for several weeks. At the port we transferred to a train and were hauled right onto the show grounds at the outskirts of the city.

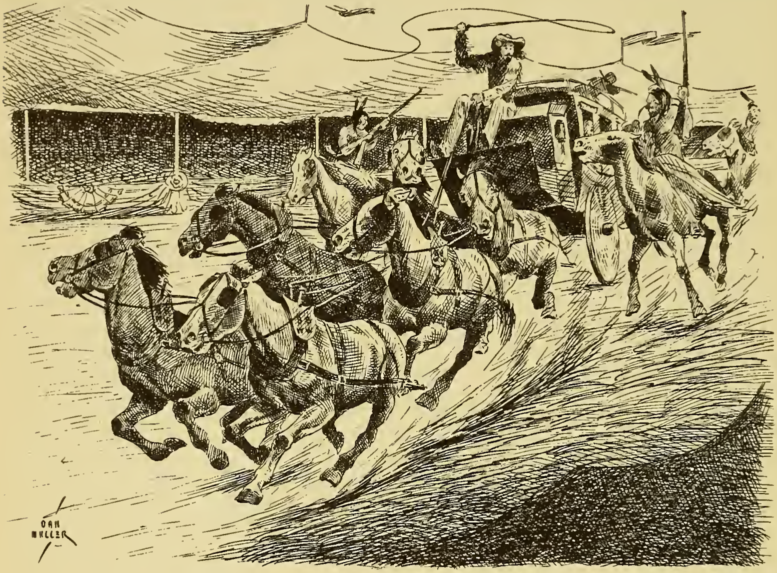
The performers and show personnel slept in sleepers that were kept on a siding in the showgrounds. Uncle Bill stayed at the Hotel Savoy. We rehearsed before the opening. I was a part of the show now, acting as a fill-in in the Virginia Reel on Horseback and in the Congress of Rough Riders of the World.

London was very curious about us. It was fun to watch the people stop and stare at the Indians and cowboys as they went down the city's streets. It was fun being the center of attention wherever we went. And we went around decked out in Wild West clothes. Major Burke saw to that.

Uncle Bill was always having romantic interludes. Gradually I had had to admit it to myself and make room for it in my understanding of him. The women adored him. They pursued him everywhere and endlessly. It would have been difficult for any man to resist such persistent adulation. In London, his romance was with an old flame—an actress named Katherine Clemmons. She came out to the showgrounds a lot with him, and I saw her when I visited Uncle Bill at the Savoy.

His friend, Edward VII, then King of England, was in the box at the opening performance. There was a tremendous fuss in organizing for his coming. A special way had to be cleared for his carriages, and he must have had fifty people with him, some in fancy uniforms. He was a fat man with a black beard, and he laughed a good deal during the performance. But during the stagecoach holdup scene and the Indian battle with cowboys he sat on the edge of his chair, intent on what was taking place.

Uncle Bill had met him on the first European tour when Edward was Prince of Wales and had given him and four kings a wild stagecoach ride. Uncle Bill told me how, after the ride was over and the somewhat shaken kings had climbed from the stagecoach, the Prince of Wales, who knew American poker, had turned to him and grinned. "Colonel Cody," he'd said, "I wager that's the first time you've ever held four kings."



Uncle Bill had given him and four kings a wild stagecoach ride.

Uncle Bill had replied, "No, it isn't, your Royal Highness. But it's the first time I ever held them and the royal joker too!" The Prince of Wales laughed uproariously. But Uncle Bill said the prince had a hard time explaining the joke to the four kings.

The Show played to good audiences in London, and from there we went to the Continent, where we played Barcelona and Madrid in Spain, Lisbon in Portugal and in France, Marseilles, Lyons, and finally Paris. We played there for some time.

On the tour Katherine Clemmons visited the Show a good deal. She'd leave us and go back to London, but then she'd come back again. She was with us when we came to Paris. In Paris Uncle Bill bought her a lot of clothes and a fancy necklace. He seemed more excited about Katherine Clemmons than he had been about any other woman I'd ever seen him with.

The whole European tour was thrilling and new to me, especially the strange people and their strange languages. In Spain I could understand a little of what was said because of my acquaintance with our top hand with the lariat, Orapeso, who had not only taught me tricks in the handling of the rope, but some Spanish as well.

During the long tour of Europe Uncle Bill had taken occasion to praise my work with the Show several times. He said once, "Now that yuh're gettin' big and can take on responsibility, Dan boy, we'll give yuh more things t'do. Yuh get on well with the Injuns. I think we'll let yuh try t'handle 'em later on."

I flushed with pride.

But Uncle Bill, unless he was with Katherine Clemmons, wasn't as cheerful as he usually was when the house was filling up night after night. Instead he stayed in his own tent or hotel a good deal of the time. He drank a lot I guess. Once in a while he'd have to be helped onto his horse for the opening. But once he was on the horse's back he went through all his routine well.

On the trip back to the United States, aboard the same little freighter that had carried us over, I saw more of him because there just wasn't any place to get away from people except to stick in the cramped little cabins. Uncle Bill was unhappy, I could tell.

One day, after we had been out of Le Havre about a week, the two of us were standing by the rail, neither of us saying much.

"Did yuh have a good time in Europe, Dan?" he asked without looking at me.

"I sure did, Colonel," I said.

He looked at me quickly. "That's the first time yuh ever called me Colonel, Dan. How come?"

I took my elbows off the rail and straightened up. "I guess it just slipped out, Uncle Bill," I said. "Everyone else calls you Colonel an' when I'm talkin' to 'em 'bout you, I call you Colonel too. I kinda like it."

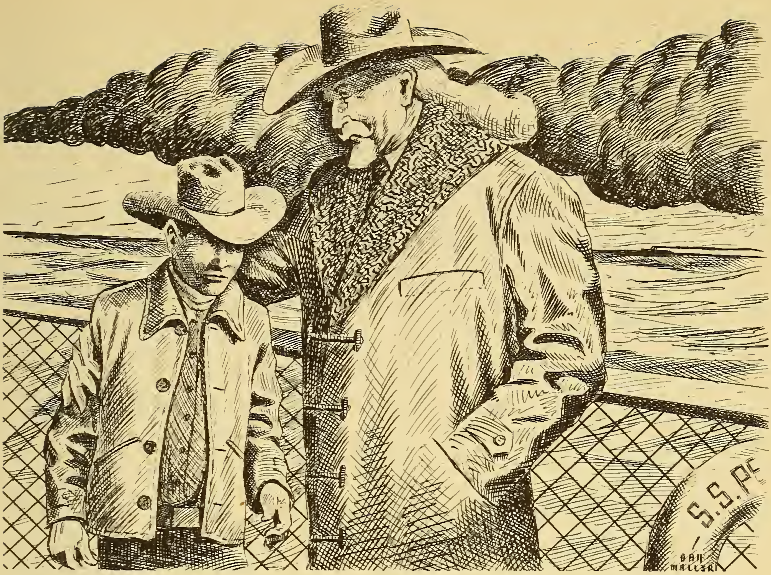
He beamed at me. "Damn if I don't myself, Dan. I like yuhr callin' me Uncle Bill. But I like yuhr wantin' t'call me Colonel too. If yuh want to, why go ahead."

I grinned up at his tall height. "I sure will, Colonel."

He reached out his enormous paw that swallowed one of mine and shook my hand clear to the shoulder. "I believe yuh're growin' up, Dan. I'm kinda glad o' that. An' seems t'me yuh're gettin' like yuhr paw, too. An' I'm gladder 'bout that! He was a man. He could handle a horse, a poker hand, or a woman better'n any man I ever knew. Why I 'member——"

He broke off, and behind the almost white beard it seemed to me the Colonel flushed. "I didn't mean that last 'bout women, Dan."

"You mean, Colonel, before he met my Ma."



He beamed at me. "Damn if I don't myself, Dan."

He was relieved. He grinned and clapped me on the back. "Sure, that's what I meant, Dan boy." He held my shoulder for a moment, and the sparkle of fun came back into his eyes. "Yuh're growin' up Dan!"

He turned and leaned again on the rail. I settled in the same position beside him. We didn't say anything for a while, and I was content just to lean there alongside the finest man outside of my Pa I ever knew.

Presently he said, "Yuh goin' back t'Scout's Rest, Dan?"

"If it's all right, sir," I said, "I'll stay with Ma for a month."

"Sure," he said. We were silent for another while. "I'll miss yuh, Dan. It's got so I depend on yuh bein' around."

I was so happy at what he said that I could only mumble unintelligibly. He understood that, for he went on quickly: "Think I'll go up t'see how they're gettin' along in the Big Horns. Guess I'll stay there more'n a month. Yuh'll be at Scout's Rest when I get there?"

"Yessir," I said and looked at him out of the corner of my eye. I took a chance. "Me and Aunt Lou'll be there."

He turned his whole head to look at me. "No, Dan," he said decidedly. "Lou won't be there. She meant it and I meant it too. Lou's been good to yuh, I know, an' I don't ask yuh t'pick a side t'be on. I'm goin' to marry one o' the finest-lookin' women in the world an' soon's the Big Horn starts t'pay off we'll have one o' the finest homes in the country out there at the TE . . . I'm goin' t'get me a divorce, son. But we won't talk about it."

"Yessir," I said.

CHAPTER
13

Cody vs. Cody

WE landed from Europe in late May and I saw the Colonel off for Denver and then went to Ma's.

She was pretty well. She seemed to get tired quickly, but she looked well. And my stepfather was doing better than ever, so she had help with the flat. Ben had just finished grade school and was excited about starting in at high school in the fall. I wondered at him. Going to school still seemed to me about the biggest possible waste of time.

Everything seemed to be going so well that there wasn't a thing for me to do or to worry about. So it wasn't long before I was longing for land that wasn't all cluttered with men's buildings. I wanted to inhale the good smell of the sage and the cowbarn, to be able to look for miles across the fields and the open range. Before the month I'd asked the Colonel to let me have in New York was more than two-thirds gone, I was on the cars bound for Denver. The Colonel was there. I'd had a letter from him.

The New York papers had been full of his effort to obtain a divorce. They had brought out all the old stories of his amorous adventures and drinking. And they told of Aunt Lou's lawyers getting court orders and attachments to tie up the TE and his other property in the Big Horns, Scout's Rest, and the other ranches. For a while he couldn't even draw money out of the bank.

The thin air of Denver smelled good after New York's garbage and sea level smell, and as I walked along the streets I was sure glad to be in the West again.

Major Burke and Harry Tammen, the latter the co-publisher of the *Denver Post,* were in the Colonel's room at the Albany Hotel. They were all drinking, but the Colonel, as usual, had started earlier and drunk more.

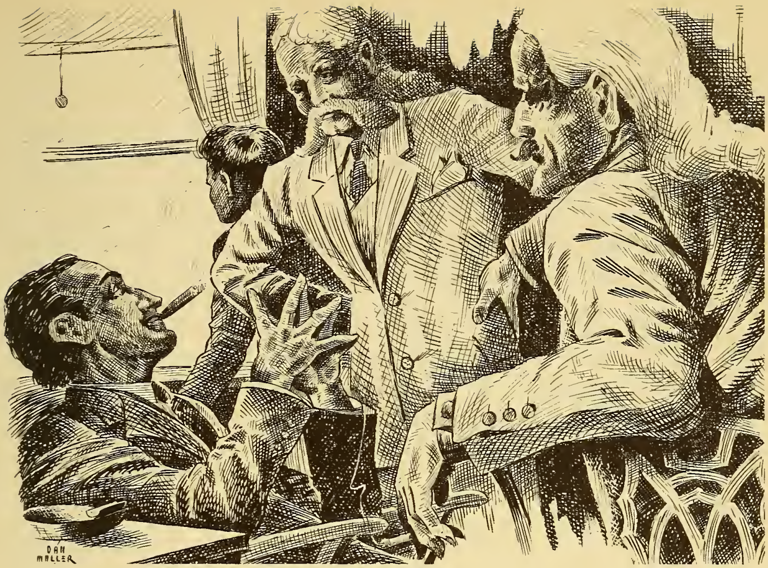
" 'Lo, Dan," he greeted. "Yuh know Mr. Tammen?"

"Yessir," I said, and Tammen nodded at me. Major Burke smiled, but turned back to the other two. I took a seat on the bed. Tammen went on speaking where he'd left off when I came in.

"Now, look here, Colonel. You know damn' well I ain't goin' to stop those stories runnin' in the *Post.* Those stories make readers and we're out to get every damn' fool in the state to read the *Post.* Besides, if we did stop, the rest of the papers would keep on carrying the story anyway. So how would you be better off?"

"But the stories are damaging the Colonel's reputation," Major Burke protested. "It'll hurt the Show."

"It sure ain't doin' him any good," Tammen agreed.



"It sure ain't doin' him any good," Tammen agreed. "Buffalo Bill is a world-wide institution."

"Buffalo Bill is a world-wide institution. Why, we'd run a story about him if his tooth ached. If he's damn' fool enough to get himself in a divorce muddle he'd better be prepared to keep right on seein' it in the papers. On the *Post* we're spreadin' him all over the damn front page, and we'll keep on spreadin' him there till he gets thrown out of court."

The Colonel and Major Burke looked glumly at each other. "Now look here, Colonel," Tammen went on argumentatively, "I don't want to print these stories, but it's my duty to the people who read the *Post* to tell 'em the news. And you lyin' about your wife, poisoning you and bein' a drunk, and all that — well, that's news, and we're goin' to print it. But if you'd call this silly thing off, we wouldn't have nothin' to print. You might as well. You ain't got no more chance of winnin' this suit than a snowball in Hell."

There was a brief silence in the room. Then Major Burke said, "He's right, Colonel."

"But she did try to poison me!" the Colonel said. His searching eyes found me. "Dan was there."

Tammen and Major Burke looked at me. I didn't say anything.

"You see, Colonel!" Tammen said. "You say yourself the boy was there and he don't let out a peep. People up at North Platte know Louisa Cody as a quiet little woman who stays home and tends to her knittin'. But the whole world has heard about you, your drinkin' and your women. You can't divorce your wife, Cody. You'll save yourself a lot of grief if you listen to me and Burke. Maybe the lawyers ain't tellin' you that. Well, you can't blame 'em. You're payin' them a hell of a lot of money. If you're smart you'll forget the whole thing."

The Colonel looked hopefully at me again. He turned sadly to Burke.

"This publicity isn't doing us any good, Colonel," the Major said slowly. "And he's right. You can't win in any court in the country."

The Colonel reached for the bottle and took a long swig. He set the bottle on the dresser and rubbed his moustache with the back of his hand.

"Just the same," he said, "I'm goin' t'get that divorce."

Four days later we were again at Scout's Rest. Harry Tammen, Major Burke, and a man they called Colonel Dyer had come along. They'd all been at Scout's Rest before, and they quickly settled into the old rut of target practicing, riding out over the prairie, and drinking and telling tall stories after supper.

But Colonel Dyer wasn't interested in only that. He kept talking about some old gold mines down at Oracle, Arizona.

"I tell you, Bill," I heard him say once, "there's a fortune down there for the men who've got the courage and foresight to take a chance. Why, even those old tailin's got good paying ore in them. They stopped mining before the day of modern machinery. It was too costly to get the low-pay ore out with the old mining methods. But with modern machinery those mines are going to make me and whoever backs me a rich man."

"Yuh're sure o' that?" the Colonel asked. "I could mighty well use a little money."

"Sure as I am the sun's going to rise in the morning," Dyer said. "And it ain't going to take a lot of money. Why, Bill, you invest five thousand now, and before two years're up you'll have twenty times that back. Those Oracle mines're just waiting for a smart man to come along."

Harry Tammen said, "Looks like a long shot to me, Cody. You better have a good engineer look over those mines before you begin layin' out dough."

Colonel Dyer protested that he was an engineer and that he was certain that with modern methods the mines could be made to pay again.

The Colonel didn't give him any money then. But before Dyer left I helped the Colonel draw up a bank draft for five thousand. After Dyer had gone, he said, "I've known him a long while, Dan. He's a good man. If he says there's payin' ore there, why, I sure believe he knows what he's talkin' about."

More than a month went by. I got back into the ranch routine. I helped Slash out in the barn, spending most of my time with the horse stock. There were a lot of things to do and I tried to do as many as I could.

It seemed funny there at Scout's Rest without Aunt Lou. Somehow it was disconcerting to come in from the barns and not find her bustling about the kitchen making a pie for supper, or fixing a little snack and a glass of milk for me to lunch on. I missed seeing her in her rocker by the curtained kitchen window where she had so often sat to mend my clothes or make some little curtain or decoration to brighten up the ranchhouse. I sure missed her.

The first time I went into North Platte with Slash I went to see her in the little house she had taken. She greeted me warmly and insisted that I eat while I was waiting for Slash to finish his trading. But she didn't say much.

As I was leaving I said, "Gee, Aunt Lou, I wish you were back at Scout's Rest. It isn't the same without you."

She stood in the doorway, one hand on the door's edge and the other crumpling her apron. "It doesn't seem quite right to me either, Dan. I've spent so many years out there. But I guess I'd better stay away. I thought I'd never forgive Will Cody when Arta died right after she wrote that all her father's talk about divorce had broken her heart. Seemed like he'd killed her. But when I saw how bad he felt at her funeral I offered to take him back." She shook her head. "He still wanted a divorce."

Her eyes were troubled and it seemed to me that there was quite a bit more white in her hair than had been there when we'd gone to Europe the fall before.

"Maybe," she said, looking over my head down the dusty street, "maybe it'll all work out for the best."

Her eyes came back to me and lost their absentness. "Be sure to stop in here when you come to town, Dan."

"Yes'm," I said.

"Be sure you do," she commanded. "I'll have bread and jelly for you."

I turned back. "Aunt Lou," I protested, "I ain't no kid anymore!"

She smiled at me, and the smile was full of understanding for an adolescent's need to feel grownup. "All right," she said. "I'll have a bottle of whiskey for you."

My protest was not adolescence this time. "I'll just take coffee," I said and started away.

"Wait, Dan!" she called. She came down the steps to me. "I was joking, of course. But tell me, do you mean you're not going to drink?"

I suppose my face was white and strained with the intensity of my feeling. "No'm," I said. "Let them that wants it drink. But I ain't goin' to. My Pa was killed by a bronc partly 'cause he had too much to drink, an' Uncle Bill . . . "

Her fingers grasped my sleeve and I was afraid I was going to bawl right out there in the street. She let go my sleeve and patted my arm. Without saying another word I took off at a trot for downtown.

The Colonel dragged through another poor season in Europe the next winter, and I stayed with Ma, Ben, and my stepfather. Something in me as strong as in homing pigeons demanded this "homing" to Ma at intervals. Others might seem more important in my life, but she was at its very center. Ma was sickly, but she didn't seem to know why. At least she wouldn't tell me. I thought her illness due to the hardships of the Montana winters after Pa's death. Ben was doing well in school, and my stepfather's business had grown. He was now president of a New York City association of ice and coal dealers.

May Decker, the Colonel's youngest sister, and her husband, Lou, came to Scout's Rest right after the Colonel's return from Europe. They'd been visiting in Denver and were returning to the Colonel's properties in the Big Horns which they had been managing — of course it was really May who did the managing — for several years. I had only seen May four or five times altogether since I'd first come to Scout's Rest. She had never treated me with cordiality or kindness. This visit proved no exception.

"Well!" she said, as she came into the living room. She stopped just inside the door and took in the liquor-spotted glasses decorating the mantel under my colored picture of Scout's Rest, the disreputable hat that hung drunkenly from an antler of the elk's head at one side of the fireplace, the ashes in it that overflowed and almost touched the rug, the dust all about. She delicately brought a finger in contact with the arm of the horn chair and brought it up to a frowning view. "Well," she repeated, "I must say Louisa's housekeeping doesn't improve!"

The Colonel said, "Louisa lives in North Platte now, May. I'll have Mrs. Knox clean up some in here."

"Seems to me," May said, eyeing me balefully with her direct gaze while she spoke to her brother, "that there's enough people around here doing nothing for their keep that could clean the ashes out of the fireplace."

I didn't wait for any more. I slammed the door when I went out. And for the whole week she was there I slept in the bunkhouse and ate at the hired men's mess.

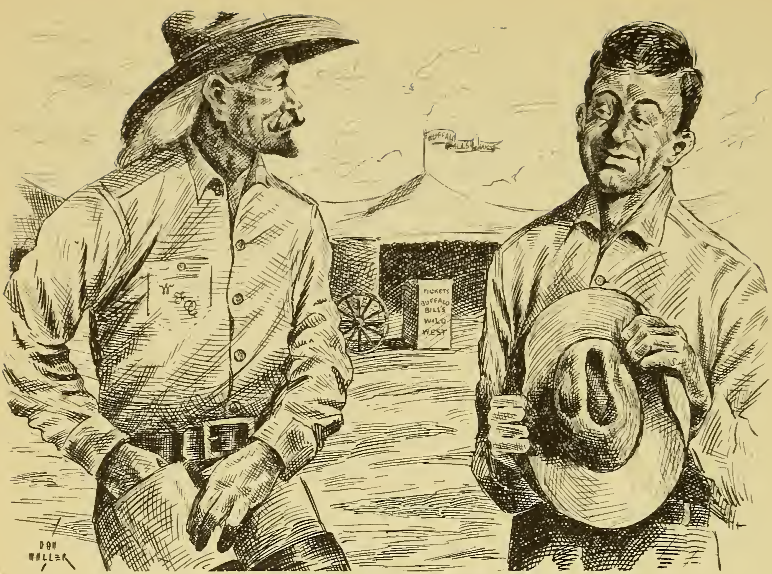
Seems like May could always get around the Colonel. Maybe it was because she was the baby of the family and he was used to making allowances for her. At any rate, whenever he met her, he was as nice as pie to her.

It was different when we'd get a hurry-up letter from her — either with the Show or at Scout's Rest — demanding more money for the Big Horns. Uncle Bill would shake his head and say bitterly, "Where's all the money go up there? Why, the Irma Hotel and the TE at least should be payin' me a profit now. But all May ever sends me is a letter askin' for more money. Better managin', that's what the Big Horns need!" And he'd fume and fret about it for days after he'd sent the money demanded. But he never did anything about it or said much to May herself about it.

Seems like the Colonel was always like that — always willing to break his neck for people who never were willing to turn a hand to help him.

Of course he was always an easy mark for anyone who asked for help. There probably wasn't a church in North Platte that didn't have a good share of its mortgage paid from the earnings of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. And only God can know the number of people the Colonel set up in business. A surprisingly large number of them seemed always to need just a little more help, and they never hesitated to ask big, open-handed, money-making Buffalo Bill for the help.

It didn't matter to the Colonel whether they were his own family or near-strangers. His hand searched his pockets as readily for one as the other. Of his family he



Of course he was always an easy mark
for anyone who asked for help.

once told me, "It's sure lucky for them they was wrong about the Show. Don't seem to remember one of 'em that thought the Show was a good idea at the start. Oh, well, as long as I have money comin' in I guess it's only right t'share m'good fortune."

And he did, loosely, wholeheartedly, many times knowing that the aid so generously extended would never be returned. I think he knew too that the people he aided wouldn't prove long grateful. Few were. Yet some of those who seemed least loyal were the ones he placed his trust in again and again. Whereas, for Aunt Louisa who had stood by him for so many years, he had only false accusations.

When his suit for divorce finally came up for trial at a closed hearing in 1905 it didn't stand a chance. His accusations of Aunt Louisa sounded as false as they were and the case was dismissed.

Everything seemed to go against him. After his return to Europe to play out against his will the showings he had contracted for with Bailey, a dull season ended in calamity. On the Continent, glanders broke out among the horses — those horses that the Colonel had watched over so carefully, that were not only the Show's pride, but its livelihood. It hardly seemed possible. Against the wildfire spread of glanders there was only one weapon — death — to protect the other livestock of the countryside. No telling which of the Show's animals was infected. Every single one had to be shot.

How that must have hurt Uncle Bill! I often imagined the tragic scene of the shooting. What a spectacle it was to the man who had given me Comanche to ride only because he knew I would never mistreat him! None of us will ever know how he mourned as one after another of his stock was shot — many of those horses were so well geared to the Show that they could never be replaced and, what must have hurt even more, many of them probably not infected with the disease at all.

Buffalo Bill was one of the world's great men. I don't mean wise, but I do mean great. His heart was as large as his Show tent, and as warm as a ranchhouse cookstove. Around his supple body there was an aura that people loved to share, whether they were Edward, the King of England, businessmen, or the lonely tike of a penniless widow. We who loved him—we who didn't merely depend upon his freely offered largess—suffered, as weakness gradually caught up with that warm, magnificent man and he withered and his powers failed. We didn't blame him, because Buffalo Bill was a great man, and it was only the weakness of greatness that finally laid him low.

From 1907 on the story of Buffalo Bill is the story of a faltering giant. There were many of the old flashes of warmth—there was even magnificence—but essentially from that point on his story was that of a strong man's reluctant descent to the grave.

CHAPTER 14

Sagebrush Cavalier

IN the spring of 1907 the Show opened in Madison Square Garden for the first time in several years. Bailey had died in 1906 and his estate took a firmer grasp upon their control of the Show. The estate's men were everywhere—selling tickets, taking them in all the concessions, and keeping the books. The Colonel had no control over the Show at all. He had no share in the profits, but was doled out what was, for him, a miserably small drawing account.

Under the pain of losing control of the Show, the Colonel was lackluster in his performance.

Katherine Clemmons, despite the money the Colonel had lavished upon her, had married Howard Gould. It is possible that the Colonel's fiasco at getting a divorce had discouraged her and that in the discouragement the Gould millions beckoned attractively. But her marriage did not keep her from turning up at odd places on our route. Those were the times when Uncle Bill was nervous. Howard Gould, apparently, was suspicious of the visits, and his detectives often followed the Show for days at a time.

To protect the Colonel and Katherine, I often stayed until late at night in the hotel corridor to guard against their being taken by surprise. Uncle Bill never asked that sort of service from me, but I gave it willingly. He was aware of my watchfulness, but neither of us ever spoke of it.

It was because of Katherine, too, that, in a Washington, D. C., restaurant, he knocked Fred May unconscious with one blow. May had once been with the Show and was familiar with the gossip. I've heard it said that on an occasion or two he had squired the beautiful Katherine around. I wasn't there when Uncle Bill dropped him, but the newspapers played the story big. They told of the old frontiersman striking swift and hard. They quoted the Colonel as saying, "Jus' a difference of opinion between gentlemen. There's no story in it, boys." And Fred May, when interviewed, added no more to the story than that.

But the Show folk gossiped endlessly about the brief battle—when the Colonel wasn't around, of course.

The Colonel's worries were showing on his worn, but still strong frame. His hair was white and very thin. I remember the night Major Burke first suggested that the Colonel buy a toupee. We were riding through Ohio after showing at Toledo and were on our way to a two-day stay in Cleveland. Major Burke came into the car from the 84-car ahead, where he'd been joshing with the cowboys around their poker game.

"I was thinking, Colonel," he said, sinking into a chair and pretending not to notice that the Colonel was pretty well under the influence of his drinking, "about how much thought you give to appearances."

"I sure do, John," the Colonel told him. "I'm a showman. And appearances are about four-fifths of any show."

"You're right, Colonel," Major Burke said in hearty agreement, as though the Colonel had won a hotly contested point. "You've certainly convinced me. Bright colors, brassy bands, snappy uniforms, cowboys in woolly chaps, and good-looking gals make a show. You're absolutely right. Those are the things the good showman watches with an eagle eye. As you say, appearances are four-fifths of the job of putting on a good show."

The Colonel glowed under this approval. He lifted his glass and drained it. "Dan," he said, after he had rubbed the back of his hand over his moustache, "rustle me and the Major another drink, boy."

"And you believe personal appearance is just as important as keeping bright paint on the equipment, don't you?"

"You're right, John," the Colonel said and accepted the filled glass I held out to him. "I've always watched personal appearance. The guns should be shiny, the ca'tridge loops of the belts all filled, the shirt of good quality and color, and the whiskers clean."

"You're absolutely right!" Major Burke declared "Ain't it a shame when nature fails us on that score?"

"Yuh bet," the Colonel answered.

"I was thinking tonight when you finished your announcement and bowed with that grand showman's sweep of the hat, what a shame it was you can't always depend on nature to do as good a job on appearances as a good showman would."

Uncle Bill put his glass away from his lips and looked at Major Burke. "What d'yuh mean, John? What'd nature have t'do with my bowing?"

"Why only, Colonel, that when you bend over like that your bald spot shows and your hair ain't as thick as it used to be."

The Colonel's fingers tightened fiercely around his glass. He brought it up to his lips and drained it at a gulp. A little of the liquid trickled down from a corner of his mouth and dampened the roots of his chin whiskers. Impatiently he wiped the moisture away and leaned forward in his chair.

"Yuh mean t'sit there an' tell me I'm gettin' bald?"

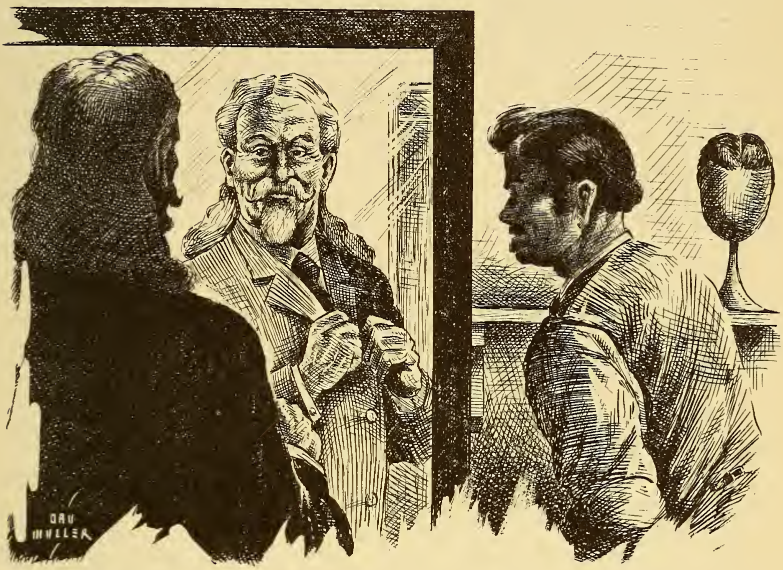
Major Burke laughed heartily, but kept a wary eye on the Colonel's hand that held the glass. "As if I could tell *you,* who have the sharpest eyes for appearance in the show world!" The Major roared at such an absurdity.

He launched into a discussion of the publicity for Chicago, where we were to show for a week. I left them there and drifted out to the cowboy car. I was almost eighteen now, and sometimes they'd let me sit in the poker game or fade the holder of the dice.

I wasn't too surprised, when we were setting up in Chicago, to have the Colonel call me. He wanted me to accompany him to the Loop. He didn't tell me the reason for the trip, but on Randolph Street he turned into a wig maker's.

The wigmaker assured him that no one would ever know he had on a wig; moreover, that it was his firm's policy never to reveal to whom wigs were sold.

"Now," the Colonel said, "I'm a man of action. Have been all my life, whether on the plains or in the cities. I move 'round fast. What's t'keep the wig from jus' fallin' off?"



The wigmaker assured him that no one would ever know he had on a wig.

The wigmaker assured him that the toupee would come equipped with tapes that would hold it securely in place.

"All right," the Colonel said, "you fix me up with one."

So they measured his head and promised delivery before we would leave Chicago.

That wig was to be a lot of trouble to me. It would get mislaid and there would be the devil's own time in finding it. And if the tapes were not securely fastened to the Colonel's scalp, the wig would slip awry. When that happened—and the Colonel was often drunk now at performances, and consequently careless—the crowd would roar with laughter. I made it a point to see that that wig was always put on properly myself. But many times, even then, the Colonel would tug at it because it wasn't comfortable, and I would hear the crowd roar.

It was in Chicago that the Bailey estate told Uncle Bill that they could give him only another six months to pay off his notes. The Show income, as depleted as it had become, had been enough to pay the interest and some small part of the principal. But the income wasn't enough to pay them off all at once. The Colonel tried to raise money in Chicago. But unfortunately his reputation for debt, the bad publicity he'd received when he'd tried to divorce Aunt Louisa, and the poor return on the Show, all conspired against him. He was able to raise enough to pay off only a small part of the notes.

As it turned out, even this little amount was not used to pay off the Bailey notes. May Decker wrote that she was urgently in need of another thousand dollars. And Colonel Dyer, in a long glowing letter telling of the immediate prospect of making the Oracle mines pay, requested an additional five thousand for the new machinery that would, he said, make production possible.

We were showing in St. Louis a short time later when Howard Gould's attorneys came onto the Show lot to see Uncle Bill. He was resting in his tent after the matinee and when they came in I was in the outer compartment to guard against disturbance.

I told them they couldn't see the Colonel, that he was resting for the evening show.

"Listen to me, boy," one of them said. "You think a lot of Buffalo Bill, don't you?"

"Yessir," I said.

"You know that he is deeply in debt?"

"I've heard rumors," I admitted.

"What we have to say to Colonel Cody may very well result in bringing him a great deal of money."

"Who are you?" I asked them. Guarding Uncle Bill's tent had made me wary of easy promises of much money. Most of the world's sharpers knew him for an easy mark and I had kept many from seeing him.

"Do you know of Mr. Howard Gould?"

"Yes."

"You know that he is an immensely wealthy man — a multi-millionaire?"

"Yes."

"We are Mr. Gould's attorneys. If Colonel Cody is interested, Mr. Gould will make it worth his while."

It was possible that at last the Colonel had found someone to lend him the money he so very much needed. Maybe he could get Buffalo Bill's West Show back into his own hands. It would make a new man of the Colonel. I woke him up, but when I told him they were Gould's attorneys, he swore.

"I'll see 'em though, Dan," he said.

I brought the lawyers back. Uncle Bill was lying on his cot, a blanket thrown across his legs. As they came in he raised on an elbow.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he invited.

The two men introduced themselves and sat down on the chairs I rustled for them.

"Colonel Cody," said one of them, "Mr. Howard Gould has sent us to you in the hope that you can be of some aid to him. If you are able to do that, Mr. Gould has empowered us to offer you a very attractive sum."

At the mention of money the Colonel's eyes brightened. He threw off the blanket and swung his feet to the floor. "Go on," he said.

"Mr. Gould," the lawyer said, "has reason to believe his wife, the former Katherine Clemmons, has been unfaithful to him. For proof of unfaithfulness that would entitle him to a divorce under the laws of New York state, Mr. Gould is ready to pay a large sum."

Uncle Bill looked at them. He permitted his eyes to go wide in puzzlement. "But why d'yuh come t'me?"

The two lawyers exchanged a careful glance. The older shrugged. He said, "Mr. Gould thought you might possess such information, Colonel."

Uncle Bill laughed loudly. "How come he thinks that?" he asked. "Why, I jus' barely know Mrs. Gould."

"Pardon me," said the older lawyer. "It is rather common gossip that you know Mrs. Gould very well."

The Colonel shrugged. "Oh, gossip! yuh can hear anythin' yuh wanta hear anytime yuh wanta hear it."

"But Mr. Gould has reason to believe that you know considerable fact about Mrs. Gould."

"Someone's gone an' misinformed him," Uncle Bill said. He rose from the cot. "Sorry I can't be of help t'yuh, gentlemen."

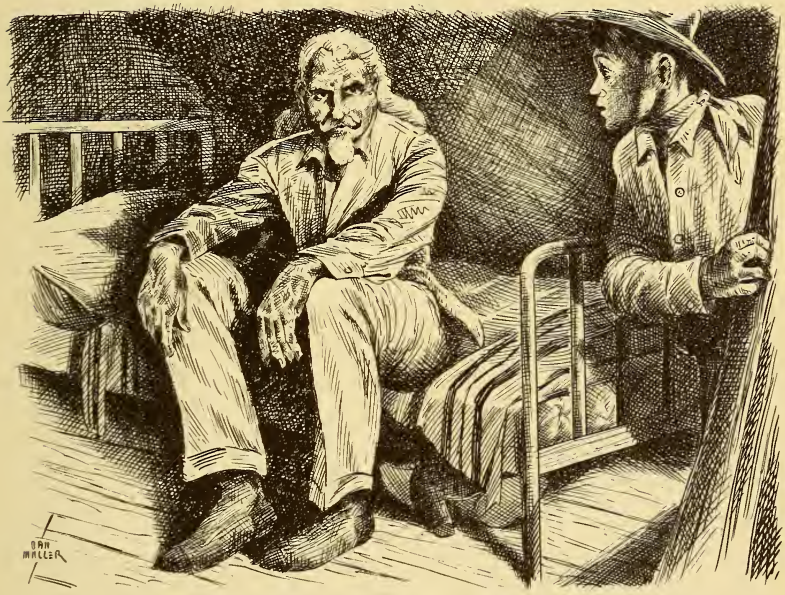
The lawyers rose too, but they didn't leave. The younger one spoke up. "Colonel Cody, let's not beat around the bush any longer. It is common gossip, as my colleague has told you, and the reports of Mr. Gould's detectives confirm, if they do not prove, that Mrs. Gould has had illicit relations with you. Your testimony as to fact will secure a divorce for Mr. Gould. If you will give that testimony Mr. Gould will pay you $50,000."

Uncle Bill's face got redder and redder as the man had his say. At the end the Colonel said loudly, "I will not testify for Gould. That's my last word. Now get the hell outa here!"

They left, striving to maintain their dignity, but their hurry made that difficult.

The Colonel fell rather than sat down on the cot. He was silent for more than a minute. Then he said:

"It jus' goes t'show yuh, Dan. If yuh're willin' t'be dirty yuh can get all the money yuh want. But if yuh insist on bein' a man, yuh can't scrape up a penny.



"It jus' goes t'show yuh, Dan. If yuh're willin' t'be dirty yuh can get all the money yuh want."

Sometimes I think maybe yuhr Pa had the right of it. 'Law is all right in its place,' he always said. 'But I don't hang 'round that law place much.' Maybe I shouldn't been so partial t'bein' lawful. Maybe I shoulda been sharp an' taken advantage of folks. Maybe then I wouldn't be 'fraid of losin' what I spent a lifetime buildin'."

He reached for his bottle and drank deeply. Then he lay tiredly down on the cot.

I drew the blanket over his legs.

That wasn't the end of the Gould divorce case. He was subpoenaed when it came to trial. On the stand he denied intimate relations with Katherine Clemmons either before or after her marriage to Howard Gould.

Uncle Bill's own lawyers urged him to sue Katherine for some of the money and jewels he had lavished upon her. He refused this as indignantly as he had refused the Gould attorneys.

And he needed the money so very much.

CHAPTER

15

No Time for Grief

WHEN we opened in New York in the spring of 1908 Ma wasn't well. She was quite weak and did little of her own housework. Ben and my stepfather, who had seen her slow decline, were not so aware of the haggardness of her face and her growing weakness. But ill as she was she smiled a good deal and seemed delighted with whatever Karl, my stepfather, Ben, or I had to tell her.

As we loaded the Show aboard the cars and got under way for twenty-six weeks of touring I was worried.

The Colonel was worried too. Through the past winter he hadn't been able to raise the money to pay off the Bailey notes. Consequently we were still showing under the Bailey management, for, while they had said they would foreclose on the Show for nonpayment, it was to their advantage to keep it running. The Show not only paid its own way, but it paid the interest on those notes and even some of the principal.

It was late June and we were playing Grand Rapids, Michigan when I got the wire from my stepfather:

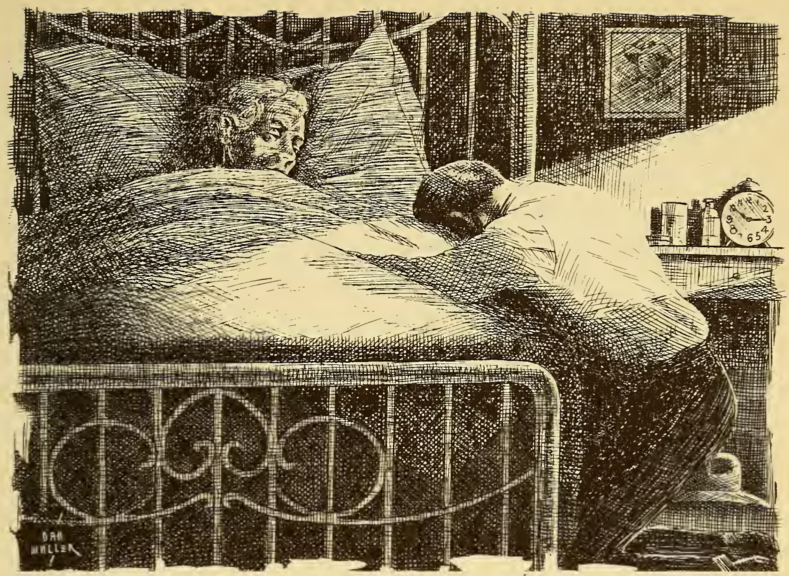
YOUR MOTHER DYING OF CANCER. COME.

I got to New York as fast as I could, but of course the trip seemed endless to me. In the two months since I had been in New York with the Show, Ma had failed to a mere shadow of her usual strong self. To one who had not seen her since the Montana days she would have been unrecognizable. There were deep dark shadows of pain streaked under her eyes. Her dark brown hair that had glowed was a brittle, lackluster mass that framed her pain-scarred features.

I threw myself on my knees beside her bed and buried my face in the covers.

"There, Dan boy," she said soothingly, and her voice still held the warm timber that had thrilled and encouraged me against the hardships of the Montana winters, "don't get yourself worked up over me. I know it's coming and I know there's nothing that can keep it from happening. Now that Ben is safe with your stepfather and you with Colonel Cody, I'm willing to go. Maybe, Dan," and Ma stroked my bent head, "maybe there on the other side I'll see your Pa, maybe even he'll be riding Chuck and Otejo'll be tagging along behind."

My shoulders shook with my grief and Ma continued to pat me on the head and the shoulders. Gradually, as



I threw myself on my knees beside her bed and buried my face in the covers.

her kindness and warmth had done in the years on the Cross-Up, her calm acceptance of fate quieted me. Finally I looked up.

"There, son!" Ma smiled. "That's better. Now it's out of your system and we can go on with the things that need to be done. But not now. I have some time yet. We shall talk together many hours before I must go."

In the month that remained of Ma's life I was with her constantly. Ben and my stepfather went daily about the work of the coal and ice business. I was the housekeeper and nurse. I cooked many little delicacies for her, hoping that she could eat them, and she, with her invariable bravery, always tried. But there was little she could eat. Cancer of the stomach is a horrible thing.

During those thirty days I saw Ma die a little every day.

We talked of many things. I told her how happy I was with the Colonel. I didn't tell her of his troubles, but some of them she must have known. It was enough that she knew that I loved him and was happy with him.

"I've been often afraid for you, Dan," she said once. "You are so like your father. Quick of temper and impatient with the rules and laws men have made to live by. Some of the reason behind the firm friendship of your father and Colonel Cody lay in that both of them were like that, too. But the Colonel has learned to live by the rules and maybe he can persuade you too that the easiest path is one that is acceptable to the people around you."

We spoke of many things back in the days of the Cross-Up that were dear to both of us. Together we rebuilt the trips into town. Once she asked me if I remembered my wolf cub, Sabino. Of course I did, and we laughed together about the fright he had given the Sorenson boys.

She told me of her first meeting with Pa. She had been a young woman in an immigrant train and he a famed scout of the plains. They had met in Bismarck, North Dakota. Her eyes shone as she told me of his fiery courtship, of a resolution that was not even dented by her first "no." That "no," she admitted, smiling reminiscently and forgetful for a moment of the constant pain that gnawed her life away, had been not because she didn't love him. She had from the first moment. The "no" was because his impulsiveness, his sureness, his daring, had frightened her. "I never got over that fright," Ma admitted, her eyes forgetful of me and remembering only the days of love on the prairie. "But I did get used to living with it. And it was exciting."

She pictured for me the Teton country as she first saw it. There were no houses. Besides the tall coarse grass there was only an occasional cottonwood, growing only because it was stronger than the elements that attempted its defeat. She told me of the endless hours of labor Pa and she had given to the building of the Cross-Up ranchhouse, the little barn, the corrals, and the sheds. "It's considerably harder," she said, "when there isn't a lumber yard to get your boards from, nor a hardware to supply nails and hardware."

She told of Pa's discouragement in the growing of vegetables. Irrigation was necessary and it took long hours of labor with a shovel to betray the waters of the tiny creek to the roots of beets, potatoes, beans, and other much-needed foods. In her voice as she told of the onslaught of a grasshopper plague that devoured the leaf and body of every vegetable, there was wonder that they still had had the courage to try again.

"Your Pa," she said, her eyes still seeing those happy, hardship-filled days, "called the Cross-Up 'Hell's Acres' because nothing could be made to grow there any more than in hell."

Their determination had been so great! To the dry unwilling soil they had brought saplings to plant that would shelter the Cross-Up of their childrens' day alike from the torrid sun of a Montana summer and the arctic blasts of the Montana winter. Those saplings had not enough strength to combat the rigors imposed upon them. At the end, as I remembered, there was only that old giant cottonwood.

"Those failures broke the heart and spirit of many men. But they failed when they met up with your Pa." Her eyes had lost their sickness, and they shone with the fire of a strong memory. "Your Pa accepted the failures with a laugh. He always had the strength to try again."

"Your Pa," she said, after a little pause in which I was a very small boy on the Cross-Up, "was the most man I ever saw. Hossface was a man, and there were many others, but none was so much man as your Pa." She let a moment's silence occupy the room.

In quite a different way she talked of other things—of her early childhood in Germany, of the trip to America, of the movement to the West, of her marriage to my stepfather.

"I want you to know, Dan," she told me once as she reached to the edge of the bed and took my hand, "I didn't marry your stepfather because he took my 'Injun's' place. I married again because raising two boys was too much for a woman to do successfully. Your stepfather has been kind and gentle, and he has become a real father to Ben. Not to you, I know! But Ben was too young to know his Pa."

And then—at long last and at the same time so very suddenly—it was over. The doctor was gone and a sheet covered Ma's wasted face.

After Ma's funeral I stayed only a week in New York. Ben wanted to stay with my stepfather, and my stepfather wanted him to stay. There was nothing of Ma's in New York that I wanted to keep as a memento. Cross-Up had held little for her to bring to New York if she had had the means of carrying it. And what she had gathered about her in New York was foreign to me. So I refused with thanks my stepfather's offer of anything of hers.

I rejoined the Show at Madison, Wisconsin. I was a very sober young man of eighteen. In some way I felt that if I had been stronger I could have made it possible for Ma to carry on at the Cross-Up — that perhaps she might still be alive if I had worked harder. That was silly, and I knew it was. A Montana winter offers few handholds for successful living for the most physically able of adults. For a nine-year-old boy and a woman, there was no handholds that weren't greased for slipping out of reach.

To me Ma always remained the mother of the Cross-Up. Although I hadn't realized it, the New York years, which added up to more than my years at the Cross-Up, had been important to me only as a period of unconsciously trying to go back. Ma's death meant that we had failed. And it seemed to me that the failure was more mine than hers, for I had grown in ability while she had physically failed.

I didn't speak of this feeling much to Uncle Bill. Actually I didn't have concrete thoughts about it. It was just a deep shadow that had settled over me that made me feel that I must be unequal to the problems I had and would continue to meet. I had the sickening feeling that I was unequal to life itself.

But if I did not speak of these feelings to the Colonel, he must have understood them. He was exceedingly gentle. For a time he even stayed sober so that he wouldn't present problems that I must solve. I did my bit in the Show — parading with the cowboys, riding in the Virginia Reel, and taking a turn now and then on some of the lesser broncs in the bucking feature. But I'd lost my interest in doing these things well. I performed my duties as perfunctorily as one brushes his teeth in the morning.

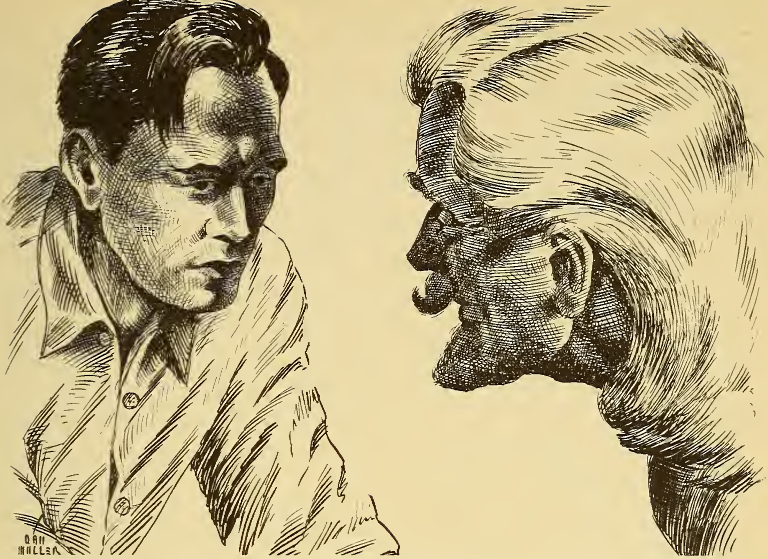
I'd even lost interest in the poker and dice games in the 84-car. A good deal of time was spent in moping in a seat. Sometime I tried to draw, but a jolting train doesn't offer much of an opportunity for the artist, and I wasn't really interested in that either, now. Ma's death had cast a darkness that hung impenetrably about me.

After three weeks of this, the Colonel called me back to his car as we traveled from one show date to another. He was quite sober, although there was a glass in his hand. No one else was there. Not even Major Burke.

The Colonel regarded my flaccid posture in the easy chair and took a swallow from his glass. He set it down on the table at his side. "One of the things I've been admirin' about yuh, Dan, is that the older yuh grow the more dependable yuh become. Yuh don't wait t'be tol' what yuh should do. Yuh look around, see what should be done, an' do it. That's a mighty fine way t'be. The folks 'at can do things without bein' tol' t'do 'em are pretty scattered. But yuh ain't been like that since yuh come back t'the Show. Now sometimes yuh don't even do things when yuh're tol' t'do 'em."

I looked at him and nodded dully.

" 'Course," he went on, "I know it ain't a-gonna last with yuh. Losin' yuhr Ma is a mighty sad business, an' I don't wonder if yuhr mind ain't on what yuh're doin'. But yuh ought t'do somethin' t'get yuhrself outa the dumps. Yuhr Ma sure was a fine woman. Of all the women I know I don't know one other that' 'ud had



I didn't look at him. I was beginning to feel ashamed at having failed to do my job well.

the gumption t'try t'carry the Cross-Up alone through three winters. But when she found out she wasn't able t'carry on, she had the good sense t'give up. She saw to it that you and Ben was taken care of. She kept on doin' her job, yuh see?

"You should carry on, too, Dan. Why yuh're only eighteen. Yuhr whole life's got t'be lived yet. Yuh've given enough time t'grief. Now yuh gotta go on livin'. D'yuh see?"

I didn't look at him. I was beginning to feel ashamed at having failed to do my job well. But I didn't feel any urgent conviction that I ought to start right out and be a blaze of light and hope.

"Well," the Colonel went on, and he reached for his glass and took a good healthy slug now, as though he'd been holding back on the drinking until he could see what way things were going and was now sure that he had them under control, "I been thinkin' that the Show's no place for yuh the rest of the season. But I got some things that need t'be done and I think maybe you could do 'em for me. What d'yuh say?"

"Yessir," I answered. "I'll do anything you want me to, Colonel."

"That's the spirit!" he said. "Now listen close. Yuh ain't ever been up t'the Big Horns. We often talked of yuhr goin' but there always somethin' turned up to keep yuh away. An' I guess yuh wasn't ever anxious to get close t'May, either.

"The Big Horns is a great place, Dan. Yuh've heard me speak of 'em, and I guess I don't ever get tired thinkin' an' plannin' fer the Big Horns. Folks laughed at me when I told 'em that the Big Horns would one day be one of the best farmin' lands o' the West. They laughed when I started to invest money in diggin' irrigation ditches and buildin' a dam. They laughed when I brought folks in t'settle the town o' Cody. Well, they're gettin' so they don't laugh so hearty now. The railroad's come to Cody, and it's bringing visitors to the grandest sights God ever created. Cody's the place they gotta come t'see the Yellowstone. And not only that. Now the gov'ment's started to build an irrigatin' dam on the Shoshone. It won't be long now until all the things I been dreamin' of there will be reelized.

"Well, yuh've heard me speak o' the Big Horns: the Irma Hotel, the TE an' Baker an' the other ranches an' hotels. My sister May an' her husband Lou are runnin' 'em for me. But they ain't makin' me money. They're costin' me money. Now that don't seem right t'me. I don't know what's wrong. But I wanta find out soon.

"I jus' can't see how come the TE never pays for its upkeep. Last year I threw four hundred head of Herefords on the TE. With calvin' an' good feed they should increase. Ain't that right?"

"It seems like," I said. I said it, I believe, more brightly. I was beginning to take an interest in the Colonel's problems.

"Well they don't seem to increase none atall. I can't understand that. No sir, I just can't understand that. We haven't shipped any beef for ages. I'm beginnin' t'wonder, Dan. I can't help thinkin' we ought t'be shippin' beef from the TE. Another thing. The Irma Hotel ain't bringin' me in revenue either. An' the Pahaska an' the Wapiti ought t'*go*. The Irma's the best hotel in all Wyoming, an' Pahaska and Wapiti are good spots right on the road t'Yellowstone Park from Cody.

"There's somethin' about this business I jus' don't savvy. The time's come when I ought t'be through investin' and begin reapin' for all the money I spent out in the Big Horns."

His face as he put down his glass held real lines of worry. I don't believe I'd ever noticed those on his face before. He'd always accepted disappointment in his business ventures as a matter of course. But now he was worried. He told me why.

"I've got reason t'want t'make money in the Big Horns. It's all mortgaged but I own a lot that ain't been touched yet. An' yuh know the Show ain't been doin' too well. Well, jus' last week I found out Colonel Lillie — yuh know, Pawnee Bill — has been buyin' my notes held by the Bailey estate. If the Pawnee Bill

Show gets t'own all my Show paper you can guess jus' what's goin' t'happen to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Maybe it'll go on makin' money, but it'll be makin' money for Pawnee Bill, not for Buffalo Bill.

"Well, now here's what. I think yuh oughta leave the Show for the rest of the season. An' what I'd like yuh t'do is t'go t'the Big Horns. I don't want yuh t'be brash or anythin'. I jus' want yuh t'keep an eye on things. I want yuh t'see what's goin' on and tell me about 'em. You mustn't do anythin', no matter how bad it looks t'yuh. If yuh'll do that for me, it maybe could save me from becomin' a poor man jus' overnight. Will yuh do that for me, Dan?"

"Yessir," I answered. "I'll leave tomorrow."

CHAPTER 16

Cowboy Bellhop

THE town the Colonel had founded in the Big Horns, and which had been named for him, had, when I came to it for the first time, probably about a thousand people. It had dirty streets and wooden sidewalks. The only stone building was the Irma Hotel which, though it was considered the finest hotel in Wyoming, had only two floors. The Irma had twenty-odd rooms, all on the second floor. The lobby was of some size and was decorated with buffalo heads and various kinds of relics of the West, most of them from Uncle Bill's own large supply. There was no elevator, but a wide staircase rose impressively to the upper floor. The downstairs had the lobby, a dining room, and the large bar.

The store buildings along the four-block-long Sheridan Avenue were single storied with false fronts simulating second stories. They deceived no one. Most of the stores had thick wooden poles in the street at the sidewalk for a hitching rack for the customers' horses. At any time of the day or night celebrating cowboys would have their ponies tied there. About half of the storefronts had saloons behind them.

Across dusty Sheridan Avenue from the Irma was the bank. I was later to meet its president, George Beck, in the company of the Colonel. Not far away was the office of the *Cody Enterprise,* the town's weekly newspaper, and near this was the largest store, the Cody Trading Company. The owner of this store, Jake Schwoob, was a good pal of Uncle Bill's, and he, along with the banker and another store-keeper sometimes drank long into the night. A block away from the Irma was the saddle maker's, whose fame brought many cowboy orders from all over the west. The saddle maker was Dave Shelley. The photographer, Hiscock, was next door to the saddlery. His pictures of the Big Horns and the Yellowstone have often been reprinted.

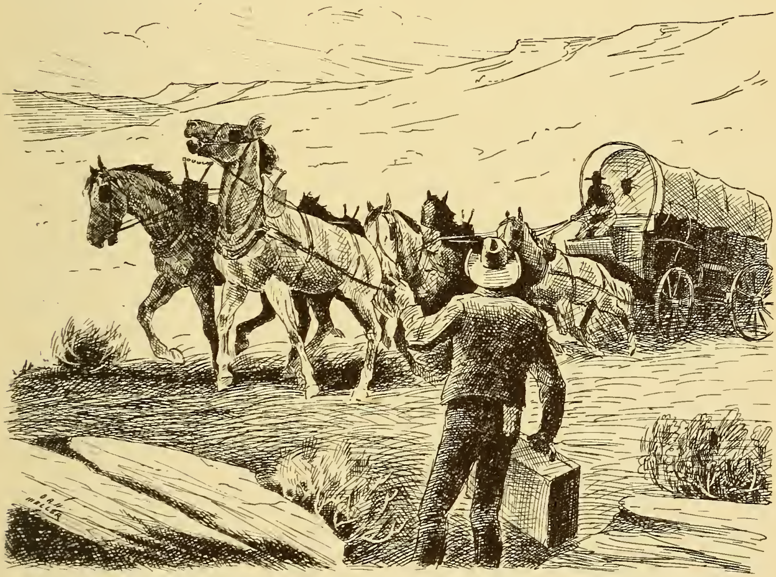
The Tonsorial Parlor — it was so labeled — was presided over by Art Owens. Connected with the establishment were two little cubby holes with real bathtubs — a rarity in the West of that day. Cowboys, after a hard winter on the range which seldom permitted them to take their clothes off at all, flocked in the spring to the Owens' tubs to bathe for a long hour before visiting the bawdy houses at the edge of town.

Another mecca for the cowboys from the range was Dave Jones' haberdashery, where they found a wide variety of goods dear to a cowpoke's heart. The saddle

Rock restaurant knew the hearty appetites of the men of the range, and their meals fitted that capacity.

Toward Sage Creek, a few blocks east of Sheridan Avenue, and outside Cody's limits, were Ollie's and Feely's places. After his long bath the love-hungry cowboy found the answer to his physical needs at either of these places, and, once they were satisfied, the answer to his gambling instinct and his thirst for something stronger than the melted snow that had wetted his thirst through the winter. The Colonel, I later found, often found entertainment and company with the hard men of the range in Ollie's and Feely's.

The Colonel had told me that the railroad ran right into Cody, so I was surprised that the station was actually three miles from the town. I picked up a ride into town on a freighter's wagon.



I picked up a ride into town on a freighter's wagon.

Uncle Bill had told me that he had written to his sister, May Decker, that I was coming. But she wasn't happy to see me.

"Land sakes!" she said, "another one to loaf and take my money."

The Colonel had warned me that I must hold my temper, that I couldn't find information for him if I antagonized May. So I didn't utter the hot words boiling on my tongue.

"There just ain't anything for you to do," she said. "But you can be the night clerk here at the hotel. There ain't much to do, but it'll be a place you can say you're workin' so you won't need to feel like a loafer."

Those, I guess, are the friendliest words May Decker ever addressed to me. If they seem to lack a certain warmth, well, I can quote you much harder ones that were more often on her tongue.

I didn't want to be a hotel clerk, and the Colonel hadn't foreseen any such occupation for me. I think, in his guileless way, he had thought that May would assign me a room at the Irma and that until his arrival I would be free to look around at my leisure.

But I didn't mind being the night clerk. May was right. There wasn't a great deal to do, but there was very much to listen to. Cody was not only a cowboy's town, but through it also passed the visitors to Yellowstone Park. They'd stop at the Irma overnight, and in the morning would be whisked away by the White Steamer automobiles that had taken the place of the stagecoach on the stretch leading to the Park entrance. These people were not hurried and liked to talk, as did the people of the Big Horns who came into the hotel and bar.

I did want to see the route to the Park which had been named the Cody Road. The White Steamers huffed and puffed their way over the fifty miles to the Park entrance, stopping at Wapiti Inn, some seventeen miles out from Cody, and at Pahaska Tepee, just a mile and a half from the entrance to the Park. But twelve hours of hotel clerking left no time for such lengthy excursions.

May Decker was either too smart for the Colonel and me, or pure cussedness led her to employ me in the one position that would keep me from seeing just what were the operations in the Buffalo Bill Big Horn projects managed by her.

There seemed to be no answer to the difficulty she put in my way. After a few days I wrote the Colonel of my predicament, and he wrote me (in care of General Delivery so that May would not know that he was writing) to sit tight, that he would be coming out in late October.

Louis Decker, May's husband, was named in the Buffalo Bill literature as the manager of the Big Horn enterprises. Actually May ran everything. Lou did little more than look pleasant as he passed through the hotel lobby on his way to the bar or a fishing excursion with Ed Connery, the day clerk. On the occasions of these fishing trips I was called on for extra duty. But though Lou Decker was leisured in his movements, May was not. She was continually traveling along the Cody Road, checking on the people at Wapiti and Pahaska, or driving out to the TE, from which she could check the Baker and Smith and the other ranches. She certainly had a tight enough rein on the Big Horns' affairs to have kept the Colonel from losing money.

In that period while I waited for Uncle Bill to come and rescue me from my position behind the desk of the Irma Hotel, two things happened that were to have a profound effect upon me. The more pleasant of these, and I was wonderfully thrilled by it, was the sale of my first painting.

In the few hours that were my own away from the hotel I took to wandering about and sketching. One day I took some water colors and hitched a ride on one of the White Steamers to the De Maris Hot Springs, some five miles in the direction of the Yellowstone. I set up my equipment near the smelly springs that caused the Indians to name the river the Shoshone — "stinking water" — and set to work recording Cedar Mountain. I was well into it when someone spoke to me. I had been so intent on the work I had not heard his approach.

"That's a mighty fine likeness," the man said.

I suppose I grunted absently. At any rate I continued to paint. "When you finish that do you want to sell it?" the man asked.

My attention was his in a flash. But I answered cannily, "Well, I don't know."

"I'm willing to give you five dollars," he said.

"Well, all right," I answered, "if you still like it when I'm finished."

He looked at it admiringly. "I will," he answered surely. "I'm Jake Schwoob," he said. "You must be Dan Muller, Bill Cody's ward."

"Yessir," I said.

"Bill's told me about you," Schwoob said, "about your drawing. It's funny, but ever since he told me of you drawing pictures, I thought I'd like to have you do one of Cedar Mountain for me. And here you've done it without me even asking you to. It's mighty fine, too."

"Thank you," I said.

"I'll go away and let you finish it. But here's the five. I'll pick the picture up at the Irma in a day or two."

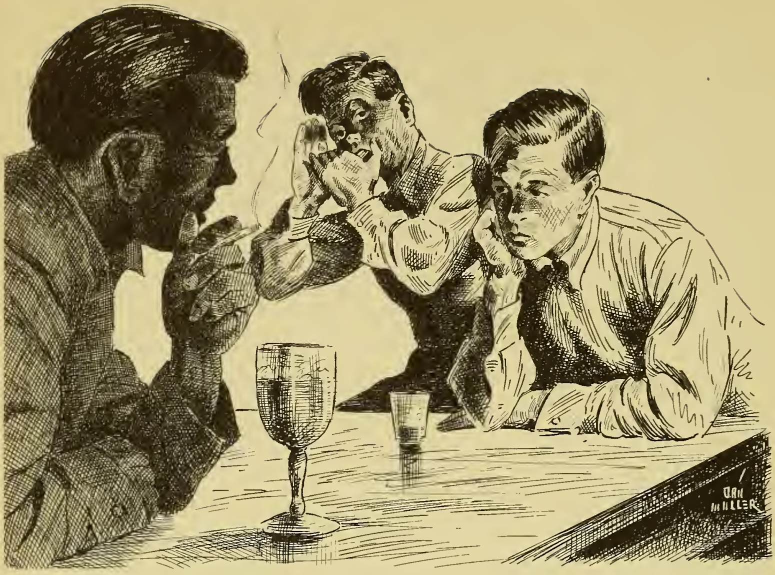
I pocketed the five carelessly to assure Schwoob that I was used to selling my art as readily as that. Actually, it was my first and my most heart-warming sale.

The other event was the meeting with Jim McCade and Smoky. So far as my knowledge goes Smoky had no other name. I met them at Feely's one night when Lou Decker agreed to spell me at the desk for a few hours. I went to Feely's for other reasons than to drink. Following the experiences that relieved me of my throbbing urgency, I went down to the bar and met the two.

At that time Jim McCade was probably a year older than me, certainly not more than twenty-one. Smoky's age was harder to guess, but I would bet that he was still under thirty. Jim McCade was short and friendly-looking, and there was a wild freedom in his eyes and in the roughly tossed-back hair. Smoky was tall and lean. His big hat was low over his forehead, and his dark, narrowed eyes peered suspiciously.

They were sitting at a table and three of the girls were clustered about them. Smoky fingered a whiskey glass. Jim McCade had a mouth organ at his lips. As I came in the girls were begging him to play it. He threw back a tuft of his sandy hair and started to play the mouth organ. He started off on "The Cowboy's Lament."

He was good. I sat down at a table and my own mouth organ pressed against my thigh. I traced its out-



He threw back a tuft of his sandy hair
and started to play the mouth organ.

line with a finger. Before I knew what I was doing I pulled it out and joined in. When we finished, McCade and the girls and I smiled approvingly at one another. Smoky lifted his glass and sipped at it, put it down on the table again and played with it. His eyes turned to observe me. There was no comment in them.

"Come over here and rest yuhrself, hombre," Jim McCade said, a wide smile on his face. "Girls, pull up a chair for this cowboy and we'll please yuhr ears with another song."

The girls hastened to obey. And in spite of the lack of invitation in Smoky's eyes, I complied.

"This yere's Smoky," McCade said, ignoring the girls, "and my name's Jim McCade. Set down, cowboy, and let's do us another tune."

We did, and I stayed well past the time I'd told Lou Decker I'd be back. But when I got back Lou didn't seem to mind. He was talking with George Beck in the barroom.

After that I met Jim McCade and Smoky several times. They always seemed to have plenty of time. I took it that they were a couple of cowpokes who'd made a little stake and were waiting for it to be gone before looking for new work.

What with my twelve hour stint at the Irma, my trips with a drawing board, and an occasional visit to Feely's with Jim McCade and Smoky, the time went by pretty fast.

It was the first of November before the Colonel, as usual accompanied by guests, arrived in Cody. He'd written me that he was coming. In that letter he'd expressed disappointment at my being so hampered by the hotel clerk's duties that I was unable to verify his fears and suspicions. He promised that when he got there he'd take me out of May's grasp. So I eagerly awaited his coming.

I was in the lobby when he and his party came in. "Howdy, there, Dan," he roared. "How yuh doin', boy?" We shook hands warmly and he put an arm about my shoulders.

May came in from the dining room. "And how's my baby sister," he called and took her into his arms. He pushed her out to arm's length after a moment. "Yuh're lookin' awful well, May, lookin' mighty prosperous."

She darted one quick look into his face and one filled with suspicion and hate at me. She prepared her face for her answer. "Thank you, Will, I'm feeling very well. Of course I'm kept busy taking care of your affairs.

But I manage to keep up in spite of the long hours and worry I spend in my work. That's more than I can say for all your help." She directed a purposeful look at me that the Colonel was not supposed to and did not miss.

"Oh, May," he said. "There's somethin' I wanta speak of. I didn't want Dan t'be clerkin' in the hotel. He's had a hard time of it, and I wanted him jus' t'mosey around and sort of get acquainted."

"Well!" said May, "He ain't overworked himself. If I can say it, I'd say he's had a good long rest."

The Colonel looked from her to me. "That's fine. Then it won't be hard t'do without him. I'll take him out t'the TE with me tomorrow when we go."

May bit her under lip but she made no comment.

The Colonel's night at the Irma was full. I stayed on the desk all night, and all Cody seemed to come in to welcome him to the Big Horns. George Beck, Jake Schwoob, who had bought my water color of Cedar Mountain, Bob Isham, George Inman, Dutch Snyder, Gus Thompson and many others. The Colonel had brought Count Ravigno and a New York theatrical agent with him. The Colonel was an eager, bountiful host, and no money entered the coffers of the Irma Hotel that night. In all fairness to May Decker it should be pointed out that that night the Colonel played host at the Irma must have cost the hotel many days' profit; and the Colonel was the warm host on many such occasions.

CHAPTER
17

I Pick My Own Poison

DURING that night of drinking and story telling in the Irma bar a snow storm swept over the Basin. So the one-night party at the Irma turned into a week-long drinking contest between the Colonel and George Beck. May Decker asked me to stay on duty as night clerk until we would leave for the TE, and there seemed no good reason why I shouldn't. So, unless the party moved over to Feely's or Ollie's, I saw much of the partying.

In the Irma bar among the pictures of a more lurid type was one by H. H. Cross of a herd of twenty-two grazing elk with Cedar and Rattlesnake Mountains in the background. The Colonel and George Beck would stand in front of the painting, glasses in hand, and toast the quality of the does, the amiability of the bucks, and the wild-life knowledge of the artist. And then they would laugh uproariously at the whole business. In the painting Cross had twenty bucks riding herd on only two does — an absurdity; the reverse would have been true to nature.

One night, when I wandered into the bar from the lobby, Uncle Bill had just started telling a story to George Beck and the Count. When I recognized the lead character as Pa, I stayed to hear it all:

"I remember the time when Carl Muller goes to a cattlemen's convention in Miles City. He wants t'learn if they's any new brands he ain't yet worked over with his runnin' iron. Now this sure 'nough is a true story. I got it straight from Charley Parks, who was with Carl at the time.

"The cars was crowded with passengers, most of 'em bound for the convention. An' all of 'em was lit up like Christmas trees. Even those that didn't drink were drunk from the fumes o' those that was. For a time singin' was the order o' the day. One cowpoke insisted on singin' 'Bury me Out on the Lone Prairie-ee-ee' and he musta sung fifty-seven verses. Carl got right sentimental an' reached for his hogleg t'grant that canary his wish. Charley Parks knocked it up jus' in time and the slug let daylight through the roof o' the car.

"That abruptly stopped the dyin' wishes of the canary, and no one seemed t'wanta sing anymore. They sorta all wandered inta the next car where a dozen stud-poker games was in full swing. The corned-up newcomers wanted in. The sky was the limit.

"Carl sets in. His Injun face never changes has he a good hand or jest a pair deuces. He cleans up quite a poke. After he rakes in a big pot by showin' a third ace, one o' the players who'd flipped up a third king, says sorta disgusted but lookin' at Carl, "Thish wash t'be a honest game.'

"This gent couldn't a-known Carl. But Carl gives 'im his chance. 'Draw, snake!' he says an' reaches for his iron. Carl's hogiron speaks before the gent has managed t'get his outa his holster.

"The gent's friends re'lize the social error he's committed, an' they don't do nothin' but lay him out respectful in the aisle o' the car, an' in courtesy t'Carl they continues t'play stud. But no one's heart is any longer in the game, an' so Carl suggests they change over t'craps. Everyone is anxious t'change the morbid atmosphere and they hails the s'gestion with enthusiasm.

"Seems whichever way she comes, good or bad luck avalanches itself on a gent, like when it rains it pours an' when it don't rain they ain't nothin' but dust. Carl's luck is like that. He continues t'win heavy. Maybe it's 'cause he manages t'switch t'his own cubes ev'ry time it comes his turn t'throw. Charley Parks rides herd on 'im, takin' no part in the game, but keepin' a watchful eye on the players an' his hand close t'his belt.

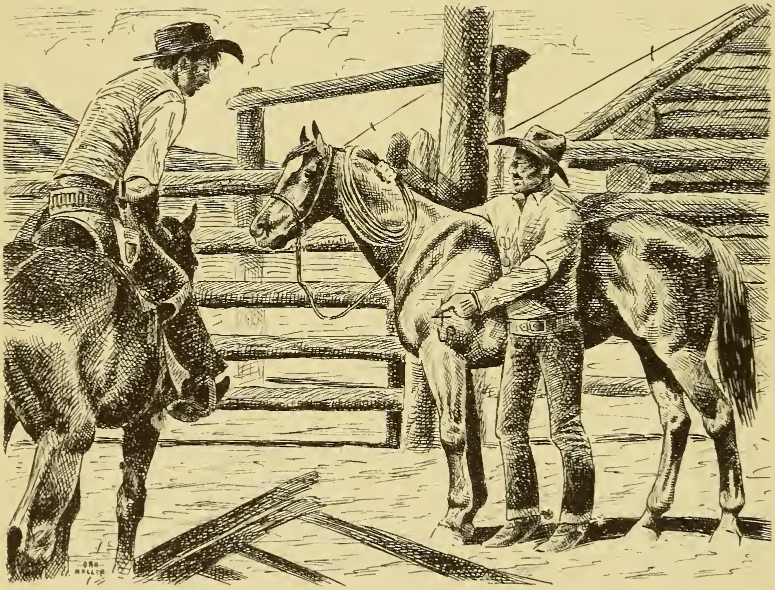
"Well, at the time Carl's luck is ridin' at its highest, a law gent, who happens t'be on the train for no good reason, comes in. He sees the corpus delicti.

"He stands at the car door an' asks, 'Who among yuh drilled that there hombre lyin' in the aisle?' His eyes swings watchful from one to another o' the crap shooters. His hands is sorta poised over his gunbutts.

"No one speaks. But they all looks at Carl. The lawman come forward t'his side, the crap shooters edgin' outa the way as he comes. He taps Carl on the shoulder.

"Faster'n the eye could see Carl brushes the lawman's hand up with his left arm and has his hogiron out. Carl starts a-backin' t'the door. Charley Parks breaks the trail for 'im. Jus' as Carl reaches the platform the train reaches the Yellowstone. Carl takes a deep breath and sails out an' down the embankment.

"Charley stays behind to argue the lawman into believin' Carl had killed the dead man legitimate. Charley said that Carl never gets t'the convention at Miles City, an' the next time Charley sees 'im, Carl's got the Cross-Up brand on a fine roan gelding. Carl tol' Charley he found the gelding in a nester's corral after jumpin' off the train . . . Yessir, Carl Muller was the most man I ever did see!"



"The next time Charley sees 'im, Carl's got the Cross-Up brand on a fine roan gelding."

The blizzard stopped at the end of the fourth day, and by the sixth day everyone, the Colonel and his guests, felt well enough for the forty-mile ride out to the TE. May Decker had sent me out there on errands a couple of times, but I'd never had a real chance to see the ranch.

The party of ten people rode pretty slow along the South Fork of the Shoshone, and we didn't pull into the ranch yard until a little after dark. The circling picket fence was pretty well under the snow, as were the ornamentally arranged elk and buffalo horns on either side of the doors. The ranchhouse was a rambling affair all on one story. Nearby were stout pole corrals and a fine bunkhouse. Cottonwoods ringed the house. Everything was whitewashed, as they had been at Scout's Rest. It was a pet fancy of the Colonel's, that whitewash. The TE and its home buildings nestled in a cradle of mountains, whose tops, even in midsummer, were snow-capped.

Everyone had been drinking on the way out, except me, of course. But the briskness of the ride, the cold, thin air, and a general interest in the trip had kept everyone relatively sober. After the Colonel and I had seen that the horses were to be taken care of by the hands and the guests assigned to rooms, he told me to come to his room.

He sank easily into his chair in spite of the long ride and his years. His cheeks were smooth and pink from the biting air. He pulled at his moustache and beard, and then leaned forward in the chair to draw a bottle out of his hip pocket. It was a fresh one and he opened it with familiar effort. Politely he held it out to me and I refused it as always. He took a deep swallow, capped the bottle, and rubbed the back of his hand over his mouth.

"Sure tastes good after the ride, Dan. But I'm glad yuh don't take t'drink. If yuh ain't careful drink gets t'be the master. And it ain't everyone 'at can keep on being careful."

I thought of my Pa and Uncle Bill. Pa had been more careful than the Colonel. But he hadn't been careful enough. "Yessir," I said.

"How yuh been?"

"Oh," I replied, "all right, I guess."

"Yuh wasn't able t'find anythin' that wasn't all in the clear up here?"

I spread my hands wide. "How could I, Colonel? Aunt May kept me workin' twelve hours a day at the Irma. I tried. I wrote you about the things I did see. But there wasn't any proof I could find in the time I had. And as far as I know, everything is four square."

He sighed and took another drink. "Sure funny how the Big Horns don't pay me nothin' after all the money I sunk in it." He took another drink.

He stared for a moment out the window into the white blackness of the snowy night. "Yuh know, Dan, I ain't ever seen the TE when it was all green." His voice was wistful. "I've always been so busy with the Show in the summer. An' it looks like I gotta keep on showin' t'pay off all the debts I accumulated buildin' it an' minin' an' givin' money for other things."

He stopped speaking but kept his eyes on the unrevealing window. Absently he brought the bottle up to his lips again. "I've a notion t'leave yuh behind next spring t'paint me a picture o' the spread like yuh did of Scout's Rest."

He turned his head from the window and his eyes found me. "Dan," he said, "things ain't goin' well. Pawnee Bill's bought up all my notes the Bailey estate held." He took another drink, a long one. His face had lost some of the freshness given it by cold air of our ride. "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show is gone, Dan. Next year we show with Lillie's outfit. He's gonna call it Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East Shows. I guess I won't even have as much t'say about it as I had with the Baileys ownin' us. Lillie's a sharp one. If we don't keep our eyes open I won't have nothin' left of all I worked for all these years. Yuh gotta help me be careful, Dan. Yuh gotta stick with me, lad, and keep me from makin' too many mistakes. Will yuh do that for yuhr old Uncle Bill?"

I stood up from my seat on the edge of the bed and put a hand on his shoulder. "You know I will, Uncle Bill."

He reached up and pressed my hand. "I know, Dan. But outside o' you an' Johnny Baker an' John Burke there ain't anyone I can trust — not since Nate Salsbury died." He squeezed my hand again. "So I guess I can't leave yuh here at the TE t'paint me a picture of it, after all."

"I'll paint it sometime for you, Colonel," I promised.

George Beck, the banker, George Inman, Dutch Snyder, Gus Thompson, and a Yellowstone Park Forest Ranger had come out to the TE with the guests the Colonel had brought with him on the train, Count Ravigno and the theatrical man. Neither of the latter were close friends. They had been recipients of the

Colonel's casual invitation to the TE and had accepted. The Colonel had met the Count only on the occasion of the invitation. Such casual guests had not been unusual at Scout's Rest either.

The Wyoming weather was far below zero. Deep snow spread over the level and the slopes of the mountain. The Shoshone was frozen almost to its bed.

The Colonel was an outdoors man. The winter's cold provided no handicap to him and he did not permit it to prove a handicap to his guests either. Unless a blizzard swept the ranchhouse, he insisted on morning and afternoon rides. If his guests' clothing was not sufficient protection against the windy cold, the Colonel always had spare woolens and robes to lend them. On these rides the Colonel himself wore a huge buffalo coat. The ample pockets of this coat always had a couple of spare pint bottles against the chill, and before leaving the ranchhouse every guest was provided with a private pint of his own.

I went along on these rides to act as horse and dude wrangler. But I was not the guide. The Colonel's directional sense, drunk or sober, was to be absolutely trusted. I prepared for the rides by putting on two sets of woolen underwear, a paper vest under my reefer, and two pairs of sox, between which I also wore paper.

As the ride and drinking progressed the riders became more and more muddled with the thin air and the drinking. The Colonel and the other westerners would dream prodigious lies of the West, and tell them, each corroborating the other when the lies seemed too fantastic. The Count and the theatrical man tried feebly to compete with lies of their own. But the Colonel's and the others' experience in the East was enough to reveal the tall stories for the falsehoods they were. Even the inexperienced riders from the East enjoyed the stories, and as uncomfortable as they were on horses, they rarely failed to climb into their saddles — often with my help — to go on the trips.

Somehow, the stories, the rides, and the liquid in the bottles all ended up together at the TE's gate.

At other times we lined up whiskey bottles along the top of the picket fence and the guests would have shooting contests. The Colonel never thought it fair that he should enter these contests, but often he would give an exhibition of shooting that, whether he was drunk or sober, was a miracle of accuracy. I have heard him promise to take the neck off a bottle at a hundred feet and have seen him take his quick, careless aim. The bottle neck would disappear, but left on the fence would be the rest of the bottle.

On the rides I never lost a drunken guest, nor did I let anybody get hurt through his own carelessness. But our freedom from casualty demanded constant watchfulness. There was the time we were over in the foothills of the Absaroka Mountains. The Count, filled to bursting with whiskey, fell behind while I was busy keeping the theatrical man erect in his saddle. When I looked around to check the riders, the Count was missing.

I turned the theatrico over to the Colonel, who took over the duty with the superior good nature of the drunk who is not as drunk as the others. I backtrailed more than a half mile before I found the Count resting quite unconcernedly in a snow bank. He was finishing off his bottle as I came up. His horse, tail to the wind, was drifting slowly with the wind some four hundred yards away. I recovered the horse and helped the Count to an unsteady seat. It was necessary to hold him in place for the rest of the ride.

Looking back at it now, I guess I was pretty disgusted with the business of taking care of a passel of drunks. I didn't object to other people drinking — I never have — but I guess I thought everyone ought to know enough to stop when he had enough. Or that he shouldn't drink at all if he couldn't handle the stuff. I was mighty pleased when the Colonel suggested that we drive into Cody.

The ride into town was uneventful. The Count and the theatrico were driven in on the buckboard but the rest of us rode. Although the Colonel and his guests had brought bottles along, the brisk riding cut down the chances to drink, and everyone was pretty sober when we arrived in Cody.

But immediately the Colonel again got a party going at the Irma bar, and it wasn't long before the hilarity and the story telling were in full swing. There wasn't a new story to me in those they started with. Besides, when I wandered out into the lobby, May gave me a cold look from the staircase. "Loafin' again," she said. "I'll bet you're doing even less work out there at the TE than you were doing here."

"Yeah," I said, "just loafin' and drinkin' my life away. It's sure fun, Mr. Decker. Yuh oughta try it."

I turned back into the bar and put on my windbreaker jacket. When I questioned the Colonel, he said, "No, I won't need yuh, Dan. Go out an' fin' some lads yuhr own age. Have some fun, boy."

So I took out for Feely's. Jim McCade and Smoky were there, Jim playing his mouth organ with three girls around him, and Smoky looking on. I said howdy to them and presently I took one of the girls upstairs.

When I came down both the boys were still there. I settled at the table and brought out my own mouth organ. We played four or five pieces, and most of Feely's girls were gathered around singing when Smoky looked up..

"That's all," he said. "We ain't goin' t'play no more. Vamoose, yuh girls, we're gonna talk business."

The girls drifted off reluctantly. "What business?" I asked.

"Listen," said Jim. "We know a man over at Greybull what wants t'buy himself thirty or forty head of ridin' stock." He stopped.

I looked from Jim to Smoky. "Well?" I asked.

They both looked at me. I think it was the first time Smoky ever looked me in the eye. He said, "Well?"

"I can't read the sign," I said. "I know two or three places I could sell thirty or forty hosses. But I ain't got no hosses."

Smoky repeated, "Well?" Their proposal began to dawn on me.

"Look, Dan," Jim explained. "Down in the Absarokas, some east of the South Fork, they's a sheltered pasture that has easy forty head in it. They was put there for the winter and they ain't anyone in miles around. We could pick up those hosses and drive 'em into Greybull. Not much trouble and they ain't no danger atall. You want in and have a cut on the pay-off?"

I thought a minute. Maybe there'd be six-seven hundred in it for me. Forty head ought to bring nearly two thousand. It would be nice to have that dough in my pocket if I should ever need it. And there wasn't much danger. I knew the pasture and the horses they proposed to rustle. They belonged to a small rancher. It wasn't likely he'd find them gone until near spring. Maybe he had got his start that way, pickin' up a few head and selling them. My pa had, I knew. Ma was dead. So it wouldn't make any difference to her. There wasn't a soul it would make any difference to if we were caught. Not unless it was May Decker. And she'd be glad. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction.

"No," I said. "Count me out."

Smoky's lids narrowed and he pulled his hat farther over his eyes.

"But Dan," Jim protested. "This is easy money with no risk. It's plumb foolish t'throw a poke away when it's as good's in yuhr pocket. Change yuhr mind."

Smoky leaned across the table toward me.

"Muller," he said, "we counted yuh in before we spoke t'yuh. We ain't safe if yuh don't give us a hand."

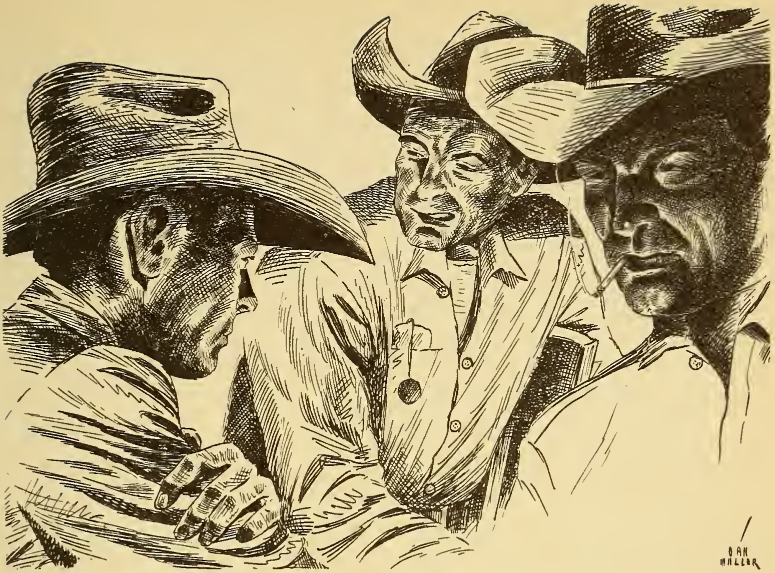
I grinned. "You're safe enough, Smoky. People like me don't go around spoutin' what they know."

Smoky's eyes became mere slits. "Muller," he said, "yuh can't laugh yuhr way out o' this. Yuh're goin' or I — —"

I stood up suddenly and the chair crashed to its back. "Save your threats for them's scared of 'em," I said. I turned to go.

My departure was interrupted. There was noise outside the door. It swept open and a gale of cold wind blustered in, causing the oil lamps to flicker, flame, and smoke. The Colonel and his party stamped into the room.

"Set 'em up for my guests!" roared the Colonel in the voice he used in announcing the Buffalo Bill Wild



Smoky's eyes became mere slits. "Muller," he said, "yuh can't laugh yuhr way out o' this."

West Show. "The party's on me an' the sky's the limit. Turn out yuhr best whiskey an' yuhr purtiest gals. Buffalo Bill's throwin' a party!"

The girls laughed merrily and rushed to capture the arms of the men on their way to the bar. There came a mixture of their high voices and the rough bass of the men's.

I turned back to Jim and Smoky. They were watching the activity at the bar, but Smoky's crafty eyes saw my movement. Casually he pulled out the makings and busied himself with a cigarette.

"You can count me in," I said and sat down again.

Jim grinned. Smoky opened one eye and studied me. He lit the cigarette and pushed his chair back from the table. "Let's go," he said.

CHAPTER

18

Too Close to Death

IT WAS about ten at night when we left Feely's. Jim and Smoky accompanied me to Red Coleman's Red Star livery barn, where I had left my extra clothes. When I had on the second pair of underwear, the paper vest, and the paper between my socks, we saddled our horses and took off.

The trail, as I knew from their description of the pasture, was the same we had come over that day with the party from the TE. The cavvy, however, was some ten miles this side of the TE. The snow was not deep. The wind had swept broad patches clear.

The hours passed one after another as we kept our horses at the cowman's steady dog-trot. We spoke to each other infrequently, but that was not because we were frightened at the mission we were on or because we were afraid of being detected. It was merely that the demands of a steady pace kept our horses spread out on our trail. The moon had been up when we started. Sometime after midnight clouds spread thickly over the entire sky, and if it had not been for the dim night light reflected by the patches of snow we should have been riding in complete darkness. Under the thick clouds the night warmed slightly and I loosed the tightness of my collar.

Jim said, "Maybe it'll snow," and there was a trace of apprehension in his tone. Smoky said nothing. But I thought Jim was probably right in his weather forecasting.

He was. The first flakes started lazily falling when we were no more than two miles from the pasture. By the time we had rounded up the horses snow was falling heavily from the windless sky. Smoky observed: "Keep's on like this it'll cover our tracks good."

Rounding up the stock was easy — they had drifted pretty much together during the early part of the night. As we started our drive toward Greybull I estimated that we probably had forty-five or fifty head. That number, I thought, would give us a full forty even after the culls were cut out.

We had gone about ten miles, the stock driving easily before us, when a breeze came up that rapidly turned into a steady wind. It opened a rift in the clouds and the moon shone through. The clouds, after an hour, were driven from our sky and the moon shone brightly. I looked behind us. Our tracks were apparent, and though the wind-driven snow was settling onto it, a broad, well-defined trail would probably not be concealed by the snow that had fallen and was drifting.

Neither Smoky nor Jim voiced any worry over the situation, yet I saw them turn to look several times at the trail we left behind. When we were still two hours from Greybull the wind died down. From that point in our trail was as evident as Cody Road.

The dark morning hours went by and we neared Greybull. I shivered with cold, and perhaps fear, too, contributed to the shivering. Our trail was too clear!

We approached Greybull as the sky perceptibly lightened. Smoky pointed to a trail that skirted the town, and we turned our horses hard into it. We had been on this trail about ten minutes when Smoky rode up to me. In the grey light his eyes semed colder than ever. "You keep the cavvy movin' slowly along this way," he said. "Jim and I will go on ahead and get the buyer ready for us. You won't have no trouble."

The horses were moving slowly and steadily forward. Smoky's request seemed reasonable.

Smoky and Jim loped slowly ahead. It seemed to me that their pace quickened considerably when they had gone several hundred yards. They disappeared. For the first time I felt real disquiet. I looked around. There, behind me, was the reason for my *compadres'* disappearance. Six riders were headed toward me and the little band of stock at a rapid pace.

"Maybe, maybe," I told myself, *"maybe it's only coincidence that brings a group of cowmen on our trail."* But I couldn't persuade myself. I knew better. The least suspicious thing to do, I thought, was to keep on. So I doggedly eased my cavvy along the trail.

The pursuing riders were on top of me within another five minutes. Two of them rode ahead to turn the horses. The other four gathered around me.

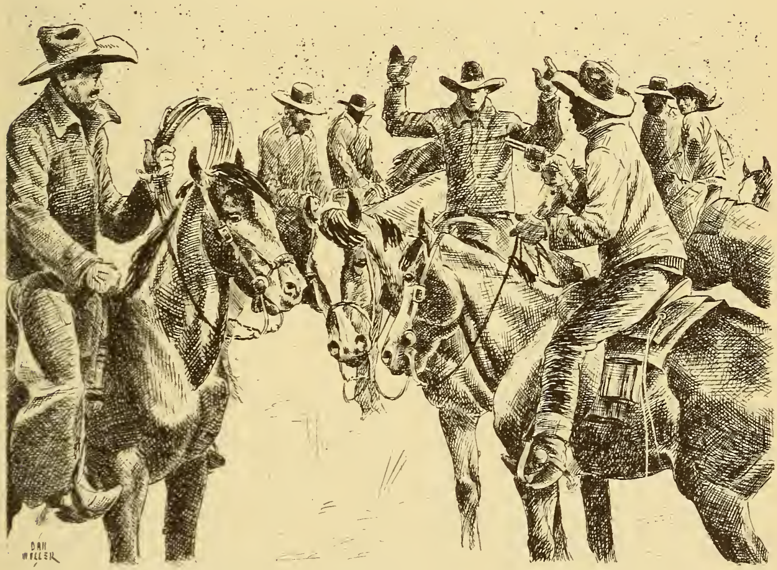
"Where yuh drivin' those hosses?" one of them asked. A minute later, as he reached inside his jacket for the makings, I saw the star. The law!

"I dunno," I answered sullenly. "They ain't mine. I'm just hazin' 'em along for a couple of men I met a ways back. They said they had to see a man in Graybull and offered me a little stake if I would keep the cavvy movin' along the trail."

"He's jus' a young 'un," I heard one of the men say to another.

The other returned, "They get started young or not a-tall. The sooner yuh stop 'em the easier yuh make it for the rest of us." I shivered. I was glad the lawman was there. They wouldn't string me up when he was along.

"Where yuh from?" the lawman asked.



"Where yuh from?" the lawman asked.

Fear clogged my throat but at last I managed to speak. "Cody," I answered.

"Where yuh goin'?"

"This is a free country," I burst out. "I don't aim t'tell anyone where I'm goin'!"

"Yuh ain't helpin' yuhrself none with that kind o' talk," the lawman said. "Yuh're jus' a boy. You tell us what this is all about and we can maybe be of help. Those hosses yuh're drivin' are stolen. If yuh're honest an' don't know anythin' about 'em we'll help yuh. Now, tell us how yuh happen to be drivin' here."

I stubbornly remained silent. So the lawman did the only thing left for him to do. He and two of the men took me into the Greybull jail.

I had begun to realize the desperate situation in which I had involved myself, but a full understanding didn't strike me until the iron door of Greybull's single jail cell clanged shut on me. It was the first time I had ever been caged. Perhaps my recognition of my predicament was emphasized by the filthiness of the little cell in the back of the sheriff's office.

The morning was well advanced when I heard rough voices in the office talking about the hoss-thief who'd been caught redhanded. In its more remote sections the West hadn't let go its old traditions of taking the law into its own hands. Cody and Greybull were certainly remote.

All at once my throat got dry and my lips started to tremble. My insides felt as if someone had managed to set giant iron pliers around them and had begun to squeeze. *They might hang me!*

I tried the bars of the window. I shook them with all my might. They were immovable. The voices in the sheriff's office grew louder and more angry. I could hear the door slam every once in a while as new members of the mob arrived.

I sank down on the dirty bunk. By this time I was seeing myself sitting on a horse under the limb of a tree with a rope caressing my neck. I wondered if the rope would hurt much. Would it press too close to my left ear? Would the hemp rasp my neck raw? Would I go all to pieces at the last minute and squirm and cry and plead for mercy? . . .

My life hadn't seemed to mean much with Ma gone. But somehow or other, when eternity was as close as the voices in the sheriff's office, life took on value. It became, quite suddenly, very sweet. It seemed incredible that I should have jeopardized it for the measly profit that I might get on a few stolen horses.

I thought of the Cross-Up and Ma. Poor Ma! She would have been horrified, as used as she was to my Pa's recklessness and his disregard for the property rights of others. I was glad she was dead! Now she'd never know about me.

I tried to get a grip on myself. I determined I would act like a man to the last — I would cuss the hanging party to the moment they pulled the horse out from under me and my breath was suddenly cut off by the tightening of the loop around my neck.

The determination put my fright in the background. It even gave me some courage. I wished I had a gun so I could die fighting — its flaming muzzle belching out my defiance and its bullets taking some of those bloodthirsty men with me.

I thought of Ben. Ma was dead and I was about to die. Ben was the last of the Mullers. The last of a line that had included Indian chiefs, pioneering German peasants, and notable scouts of the West.

I took hope. After all I was in the hands of the *law!* I was a *lawman's* prisoner, in the jail provided by the law. The *law* would protect me from those voices that demanded that I hang.

The voices grew louder and more threatening, and my new-risen hope departed under the hysterical anger of their voices. I cried out loudly to myself. *You're in the hands of the law. They won't hang you. They can't hang you. The law has you. The law will protect you. They can't — they can't — they can't.* And then I was face down on the dirty cell bunk, crying.

The voices were growing louder and louder. That law man was trying to protect me. He was arguing with the crowd. But his voice stilled when a shot was fired in the close confines of the room. A foreboding stillness followed. "Sheriff," rasped a hoarse voice, "we respect yuh an' yuhr effort t'do yuhr duty. But they's only one way t'stop this sort o' thing from growin'. If we left this hoss-thief go, there'll come others 'cause they think we won't hang 'em. We don't want that. My gun's on yuh. I'd hate like hell t'drill yuh. But I will. I will 'cause if we hang this one it'll keep us from hangin' others. Stand outa the way, sheriff, or I'll put daylight through yuh as sure as hell."

Don't let 'em! my heart cried.

But the sheriff couldn't stop them. The next moment they were in my cell, a surging, ravening mass of flesh that wasn't human. They didn't talk now. In their enflamed faces there was a lustful determination that could not be swayed. They grasped me roughly, jerked my arms behind me and tied them tight. One of them drove his fist at my face. I turned and caught the blow on my cheek.

They hustled me out of the cell and into the cold. Two of them picked me up and threw me astride an unsaddled horse. They were all about me as we started off and they kept close herd on me. We rode for several minutes, until we were out of sight of Greybull behind an elevation. A cottonwood loomed in sight — a big one, much like the one that reared so strongly above the graves of Pa and my twin brother and my sister Kate.

There wasn't any hope now. I knew that. These men had things too well under control. In spite of the cold that pierced clothes and flesh I sweated. My tongue felt terribly dry. They stopped me under the tree.

I looked up. Twenty feet above my eyes was a stout limb. As I watched I saw an unlooping rope sail upward and over the limb. I closed my eyes, for a moment. Then I opened them again.

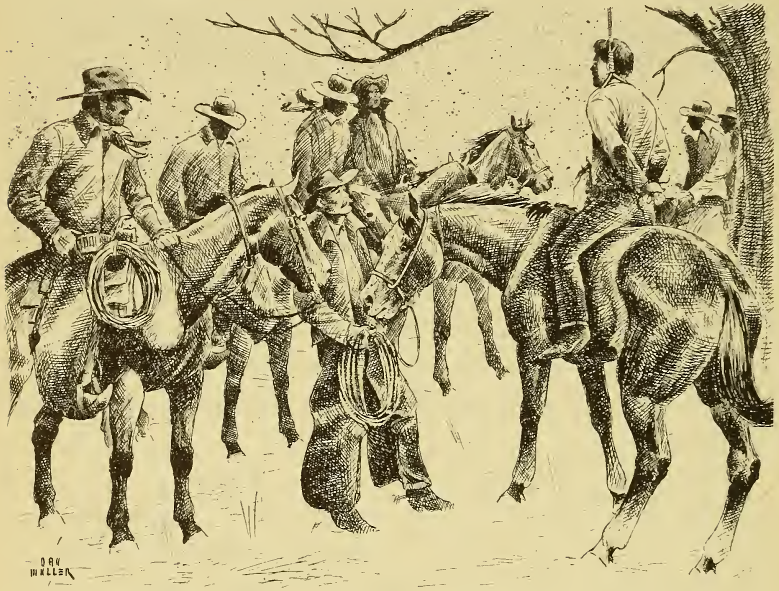
One of the men had the end of the rope and was fashioning it into a hangman's noose. He accomplished it, it seemed to me, with practiced speed. Then he advanced toward me and handed it to the man sitting on the horse at my left.

The man took it, his eyes intent, his face strained with the awfulness of the thing he was doing. But he had no hesitation. He leaned toward me and dropped the loop over my head. The manila caught over my right eye and his hand released it gently and settled it firmly around my neck. He tightened it so it was firm. Then he adjusted the hondo behind my left ear.

Another man, an expectant, fearful look around his eyes, held my horse's head.

I felt my mouth twitch. My stomach surged up into my throat and seemed to choke me. I mumbled something, but it was only a meaningless sound. I wasn't going to be able to cuss them to the last second as I had promised myself I would.

No one moved for a deathless moment. I thought



Another man, an expectant, fearful look around his eyes, held my horse's head.

They're reconsidering. They're beginning to realize the awful thing they're doing. I laughed inside at my pitiful, fumbling hope. I told myself *You are a coward. Make up your mind. You're going to die.*

A new sound had come through the stillness, but I did not try to place it, to know its meaning. Nor did I try to understand the sudden burst of talking my executioners began. I could think of only the rope that circled my neck, of the heavy hondo that thrust my head to one side.

And then my ears insisted that I recognize the sound of pounding hoofs. They were coming fast, closer and closer. Still I didn't hope. The men around me continued to buzz with conversation that I did not try to untangle. I had made up my mind to die. These newcomers weren't rescuers. They had come so that they too might see me kicking for a little while under the cottonwood.

A shot rang out. I heard the bullet shriek overhead. My eyes closed. My startled horse jerked, leaped forward, and then was restrained. Something dropped from above and hit my head. I could still hear. I could still breathe. I opened my eyes. It was the rope that had hit me as it fell from where the bullet had severed it close to the limb above my head.

I knew now I was saved. I knew it before I heard the familiar booming voice. Only one man in the world could have shot that accurately from the bounding back of a galloping horse. What's more, only one man's shot could have failed to draw fire from the men surrounding me — the one man who was lord and idol of the whole region, recognized and loved by everyone — Buffalo Bill.

The pounding hoofs quieted. There was a jumble of voices. I didn't see anything. I had closed my eyes and I'm afraid I was in a near faint as I was helped down from the horse and my arms were unbound. The first I remember was Uncle Bill's voice.

"Are yuh hurt, Dan Boy?" he asked. "Are yuh all right?"

I responded weakly that I was. It was a few minutes before I was able to make sense of things. The Colonel had turned to the men under the tree.

"I jus' want t'tell yuh all that I understand what yuh been aimin' t'do here. An' I want t'tell yuh that in yuhr place I'd probably joined up with yuh. But I want t'tell yuh somethin' else. This boy is Dan Cody Muller, the son of an old Indian scout, one of the best o' those men that opened this country t'the white man. His father was my old friend, an' Dan is my ward. What he's done seemed t'him in the tradition o' the old West. He's jus' a boy as yuh can see, an' one that I set a lotta store by. Yuh got yuhr hosses an' I give yuh my word yuh'd never have no more trouble from this boy. Dan ain't ever gonna try t'make his livin' by stealin' from other men. It was excitement he was lookin' for. Well he found it, and my guess is he larned himself a good lesson. Now effen yuh men ain't got no objection, I'll take this youngster home an' lay down a little law t'him that's aimed t'do him some more good. Anybody got any objections?"

The men grumbled a little but no one objected.

I began to recognize people. There was Gus Thompson, the Yellowstone ranger (whose name I've forgotten), Reckless Davies, Dutch Snyder, George Beck, Count Ravigno (he straggled in as I was beginning again to be aware of things), and George Inman.

There was no mystery as to how the rescue had come about. The Greybull sheriff had wired the Cody sheriff, in whose territory the rustling had been done. The Cody sheriff had guessed from the description that I might be the rustler. He had gone to the Colonel. Both of them knew what probably would be my fate. The Colonel had wired the Greybull sheriff to keep me alive if he could. And then the party had set out from Cody at a wild lope to save me.

The Colonel, after I was somewhat recovered, led me to one side. He asked how come, and I told him someone else had suggested the rustling. But I told him I'd been willing, too. The Colonel grinned at me in a way I'd never seen him grin before. "Yuh boys're tryin' t'bring the old West right into the Twentieth Century." He still grinned as he said that. He patted my shoulder.

I was permitted to leave in the custody of the Colonel. They even gave me back my TE horse, which had been turned into the stolen bunch.

As we rode back to Cody there was a good deal of conversation. Gus Thompson, Count Ravigno, and the others apparently thought it was a great adventure. But their necks hadn't almost been stretched.

I didn't think of the episode as amusing or exciting. I had been too close to death. For me truth had worked out a stranger pattern than fiction. I was grateful. And I was ashamed of myself. Before we got to Cody I had recovered enough to realize that May Decker would make the most out of this escapade of mine. She sure wouldn't let the Colonel forget about it. And when he got me alone the Colonel would have something to say. I dreaded it.

CHAPTER 19

The Colonel Gives Advice and Takes It

WE PULLED UP before the Red Star barn some time after dark, and the whole party immediately headed for the Irma bar. I stayed in the Red Star's office. I didn't want to meet May Decker. I didn't want to go to Feely's or Ollie's, either. I didn't expect that Smoky and Jim McCade would put in an appearance, but I didn't even want to be reminded of them by going to the places where we had so often met.

It was comfortable in the livery stable office. The stableman, Bob Coleman, was there, and there were a few cowboys and ranch-hands sitting around. Later in the evening they would turn into the haymow above the stalls, wrapped warmly in their saddle blankets. A bottle would pass around, and when that was emptied another would be placed in circulation. But the men weren't getting drunk. The stories were of the work on the ranches, of a stampede, of a fight during a roundup — of the things that go to make up a cowman's life on the open range.

They'd all heard of my escapade, and so I told them about it. They weren't impressed by the adventurous part of it, nor did they condemn me for rustling. Probably every one there had stolen a head of stock now and then – an unbranded calf, a horse that took his fancy. They told me that I was lucky. I was already convinced of that. I had felt the rope tighten about my neck.

Presently I too bedded into the haymow.

In spite of the Colonel's party at the Irma bar resuming where they had left off to come to my rescue, we started back for the TE before ten o'clock in the morning. When we got headed east of the Irma and out into the country, I congratulated myself on having successfully avoided cutting May Decker's trail.

The ride back was uneventful. Everyone was in good humor. They each had a bottle, to which they took recourse often during the ride. Occasionally they'd stop for a toast, and almost always when we stopped the talk would meander around to my escape from the lynch mob. I kept apart from them after the second such halt.

It was on the morning of the second day after our return to the TE that the Colonel caught my eye directly after breakfast. I could guess what was coming. "Let's go out to the barn," he said.

We walked side by side, neither of us speaking. We strode the length of the row of stalls, the Colonel making a casual observation now and then about this horse or that. After making sure that we were alone in the barn, he settled back against the stall upright. He didn't say anything for a time, but just leaned there, and every time a horse stomped, or crunched hay between strong teeth, or rubbed a hairy coat against the wooden sides of its stall, I'd start nervously. Finally Uncle Bill smiled.

"Do I recollect right?" he asked. "Yuh're nineteen now?"

"Yessir," I said.

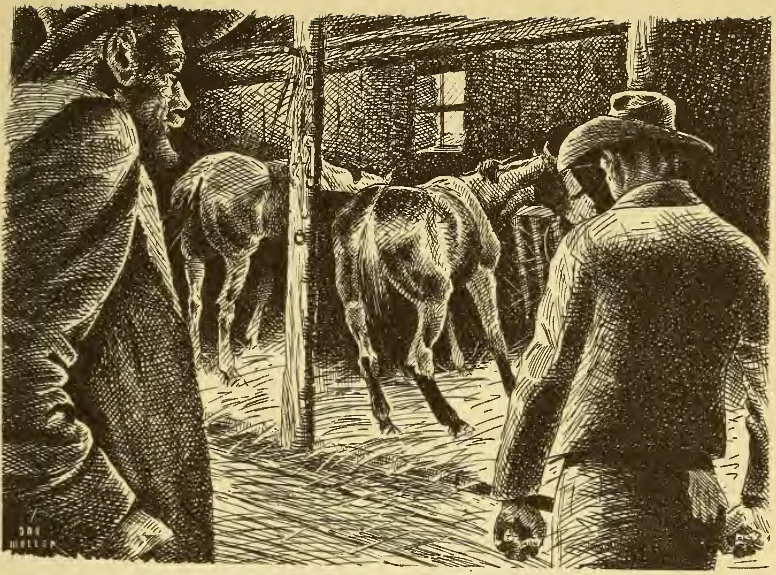
"Well, mebbe it's time yuh gave some thought t'what yuh wanta be." He was silent for a moment.

I turned the words over in my mind. *What did I want to be? Did I want to be a showman? No! Did I want to be an artist? Yes — but I wanted something else, too. I wanted the West. I wanted to be a good cowman. I wanted to break my own horses. I wanted to feel as free and easy as the best cowpunchers I knew were. I wanted the freedom of the open range. Yet I wanted, too, the warmth and security of Ma and the old Cross-Up.*

"Well?" he said and waited.

"I don't know," I told him. I couldn't tell him I wanted to be with Ma. I couldn't tell him that. So I told him the rest. "I guess I'd like to be a cowpoke for a while. I'd like to be a good one. I'd like to know how to care for a sick animal like Stacey could. I'd like to know how to get beef in good shape, how to carry them through the winter, and how to make a good sale when beef time comes around. I'd like to know all those things, I guess. I'd like to know them better'n any man ever knew them, so that when I draw a picture it will be like things really are."

He nodded slowly. "I see what yuh mean, Dan. Maybe I'd thought about yuh doin' jus' that. An' I don't see



Finally Uncle Bill smiled. "Do I recollect right? Yuh're nineteen now?"

where they's anythin' wrong in what yuh want. Yuh oughta take a couple o' hosses, throw on yuhr saddle and yuhr pack, and jus' go an' work a month at one outfit and a month at another. That what yuh want?"

I nodded.

"Yuh can take any hosses yuh want, Dan, an' yuh can go anytime yuh want. But yuh're only nineteen. Yuh got a lotta time yet. Mebbe yuh're even a little young t'be out on the range by yuhrself. They's another thing, Dan. This next year we join up with Pawnee Bill's outfit. Colonel Lillie's a sharp man. I got t'keep my eyes open if I ain't t'lose all I worked so hard all these years t'get. I don't say Lillie is crooked, mind yuh. But he's a mighty sharp one, and I've gotta watch my P's and Q's.

"I was wonderin' if yuh wouldn't give me a hand with that. I kinda thought, if yuh was willin', when we got t' New York, I'd send yuh to one o' those business colleges, so they'd fit yuh out with knowledge so's yuh could help me keep an eye on Lillie and what he tries t'do. When yuh got through, then we'd call yuh my secretary, and maybe we'd have yuh look after the Injuns. They need watchin' too, an' I think maybe yuh're the right man for it. . . . Do yuh think yuh could put off hittin' the trail for maybe a year or so while I get to know what I have t'watch out for with Lillie?"

"I'd be right glad to, Colonel," I said. I thought, *He isn't going to rake me over the coals after all!*

But I was wrong. After a moment's more silence he began. "Dan, I want t'talk t'yuh about the other day. I don't blame yuh too much. Yuhr Pa was a wild one, and I keep on tellin' stories about the old wild days of the West. Tellin' those stories an' having 'em told about me is what made the Show possible. Rustlin' makes a pretty story in the tellin'. But in the doin' yuh know now it ain't so. Yuh've felt the rope around yuhr neck. You was lucky onct. Yuh might be lucky another time or two. But in the end yuh'll run out yuhr string, and Lady Luck will turn her face away from yuh. That's the time some poke will fan yuhr hoss with his hat and it'll run out from under yuh and yuh'll be left hangin'. . . . It ain't a pretty way t'end, Dan.

"An' have yuh thought what yuhr Ma woulda said, what she woulda felt if she'd been alive? She was a mighty fine, courageous woman, Dan. Yuhr Pa worried her plenty with his wild ways. Well, I bet she wasn't restful up there in Heaven when yuh sat there on that hoss with that there rope 'round yuhr neck. I bet she was mighty uneasy. Yuh oughta make it easy for her up there, Dan.

An' she won't rest easy's long as yuh keep on gettin' inta trouble.

"Now there's somethin' else t'look at. The Old West is done with. It's as dead as if a parson read a funeral over it and the church janitor filled in the grave with dirt. There's a new West. People have come t'live and raise their families. There's schools close enough for all the young'uns t'go to now. The stores don't have jus' flour an' bacon an' cowboy things now — they have pretties for the women folk. Civilization has come to the West, Dan. Property and a man's right to it has come. The Law's been set up."

He paused. Minutes before I had lowered my eyes to the barn floor. I kept them on a toe with which I kicked loose some patches of dried horse manure.

"An' when the women got so they could buy their pretties an' the Law came t'stay, the old days when rustlin' was adventure went and died the everlasting death. Rustlin' ain't adventure no more, Dan. It's jus' plain stealin' now, an' they ain't a real man who wants t'be just a low down thief.

"An' one more thing, Dan. Yuh feel like now yuhr Ma is dead yuh're all alone in the world, maybe yuh feel like the world has treated yuh bad. Well, yuh ain't alone. Me an' yuhr Aunt Lou don't get on well together. But we both think a heap o' yuh, Dan. Yuh don't ever have t'steal's long's I have a stray cartwheel in my pocket. Remember that, Dan, will yuh? Remember yuhr Aunt Lou and me are yuhr folks."

He stopped. I kept kicking at the manure patches, afraid maybe if I looked up Uncle Bill would see the moistness that was in my eyes.

He pushed himself away from the post. "Well, I guess

I done had my say, Dan." He clapped a hand hard across my shoulder, let it rest there for a single warm moment and then walked away.

From under my lowered lids I watched him leave. I stopped kicking at the patches. Then I pulled down my saddle and threw it on the nearest horse. I rode for a long while. Along in the late afternoon the gray skies began to drop a white curtain over things, and I awoke to the realization that I was high up in the Absarokas. I looked up at the leaden sky. That snow was the real thing. It fell steadily, coldly, unendingly, and before another four days passed we would be snowed in at the TE.

I turned my horse back to the ranch.

At the TE they had seen the significance of the storm too. The Colonel had got the guests who didn't want to be holed in for the rest of the winter organized, and they were already on their way to Cody. The Colonel was with them. He permitted himself very little time at the Irma bar, for he was back at the TE before nightfall of the next day. And it was well that he was, for the snow was deep and still came down as though there was no end to the supply up there in the sky. And on the fourth day the wind started to blow. The mercury went far down in its tube and stayed there.

All the guests had left except for Reckless Davies and one other. But the party atmosphere of the TE did not leave with the majority of the guests. There continued to be shooting contests and daily rides when the weather permitted, although the thermometer rarely rose above forty-five degrees below zero. And there was still a lot of drinking. The Colonel, knowing his appetite and those of his favored guests, had laid in an ample supply. The snow covered the bottles thrown away, and those that remained in sight were soon shattered by bullets from the rifles the Colonel furnished his guests.

Reckless Davies owned a small ranch up the trail at a place called Valley. Valley was a stage and mail stop, and when the weather permitted it was my task to ride up for the mail. Reckless — I never knew how he came by that nickname — was a small, quiet man. He seldom spoke, and when he did it was as though he feared no one would be interested in what he had to say. Yet in spite of his quiet, unassuming manner, he seemed to have more influence on the Colonel than any other man I ever knew.

Perhaps he was on the payroll as a personal retainer of the Colonel's. I never knew whether he was or not. But he was always there, and when he wasn't it seemed to me that the Colonel was restless. I made a private joke of that — Restless without Reckless.

When late February came there was no break in the weather. It remained cold, and snow fell occasionally, sometimes in a furious blizzard fully as blusterous as had been those at the Cross-Up during my boyhood. Yet, though there came no weather break, there did come a break in the routine of drinking and shooting and story telling at the TE. Reckless took charge and saw to that.

The winter-long drinking had left the Colonel weak and trembling. He hadn't lost any weight. Indeed he was larger than usual. But it was the flabbiness of too little exercise and too much drinking.

It was a day late in February when Reckless took command at the TE. The first intimation I had of it was when I wandered in from some barn chores for a between meals snack and saw Reckless with an armful of whiskey bottles. He said nothing, but went quietly and purposefully out the kitchen door. Presently he returned and went into the main part of the house, from whence he soon again came laden with bottles, all untapped.

I wondered idly at that but gave it no real thought. It was the next morning when I realized that Reckless had placed the Colonel on limited whiskey rations. I had come in from the barn for breakfast and as I opened the door I heard the Colonel roaring.

"Reckless," he bellowed, "come bring me a drink! Yuh can't jus' stop all at once. I gotta taper off, man. I'll get sick if I don't have some whiskey. Now be a good little coyote and give me a drink."

Reckless' soft voice came unhurried and unflustered. "Yuh had yuhr mornin' drink, Colonel. That's all yuh get till come dinner."

"Damn it, Reckless, fetch me a drink!" the Colonel roared. "That's my whiskey an' I'm gonna drink it."

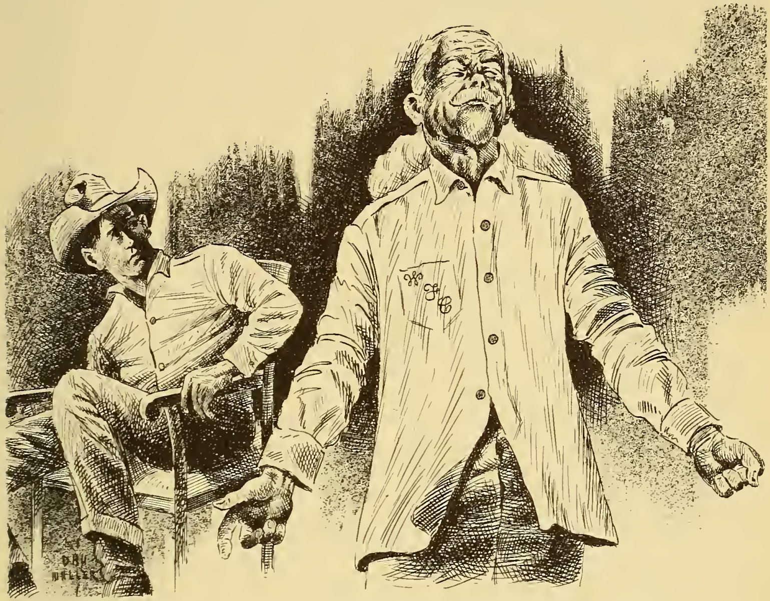
"Sure, Colonel," Reckless' inoffensive voice replied, holding neither salve nor command, "yuh had yuhr mornin' drink an' that's all yuh get till dinner."

"Reckless," the Colonel said, and now his voice was soft and cajoling, "yuh're cuttin' me off too fast. I'll be sick, Reckless. It'll be worse'n if I kept on drinkin' too much. Jus' go get me one drink. Jus' a little one."

"All right, Colonel, jus' as soon as dinner time comes." And he waited.

Those next two weeks were like that, sometimes with the Colonel almost violent in his demands for whiskey, sometimes with him pleading like a spoiled child to a parent at last become adamant. Sometimes he searched feverishly for the whiskey Reckless had hidden. At other times he tried to bribe the cook or some of the other help to find it and bring him some.

And at last he would come to me. "Dan," he would say, his eyes pleading, "I gotta have a drink. I jus' got to. I'll be sick, boy. Yuh wouldn't want yuhr Uncle Bill t'get sick an' die out here jus' for the lack of one little drink. Yuh wouldn't would yuh, Dan?"



"Dan," he would say, his eyes pleading, "I'll be sick, boy."

"Nosir," I'd reply.

His eyes would light up with eager hope. " 'At's a boy, Dan! I don't want a big one. Jus' bring me a little drink."

"I can't, Colonel," I said, dreading the look of despair that would deaden his eyes. "I can't. Reckless is in charge of the whiskey. He's hidden it. I don't know where he keeps it."

I did know. Reckless had told me one day. "We got t'keep whiskey away from the Colonel," he told me. "An' if I'm t'be of any use, I gotta stick to the rules I make. But there's onct in a while when the Colonel oughta have a drink more than I can let him have. I'll tell yuh, Dan, when that is. Then yuh go down and get him a small drink. The whiskey's in the potato cellar. Yuh'll find it under the pile o' sacks near the back. But be careful, Dan. Don't let him get around yuh. Don't give him a drink if I don't give yuh the high sign. Yuh understand?"

"Sure, Reckless," I assured him.

And so, once in a while when Reckless had given me the signal, I'd sneak a drink to the Colonel. He was outrageously grateful on such occasions, and I'd feel like the lowest of the low for fooling him that way.

After three weeks of Reckless' rigid regime, the Colonel's flabbiness disappeared. There was a fresher color in his cheek and a new jauntiness in his step. After the the second week he no longer descended to abject appeals to Reckless to give him a drink, and he asked me less and less often to sneak him one.

By the time Reckless' cure had worked its marvel, the snow had begun to melt, and at the end of the fourth week, when we drove in to Cody to catch the Burlington for Chicago on our way to the opening at Madison Square Garden for the new Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Far East Show, the Colonel was alert and fresh.

But once out from under Reckless' prohibition, he started to drink again.

CHAPTER 20

With Pawnee Bill and His Camels

WE opened as usual at Madison Square Garden. But it was not like the old openings. The old flavor of the Wild West was diluted by Pawnee Bill's acts and animals. It seemed to me that camels just didn't mix with buffaloes, horses, and Indians. It was like a circus more than a Wild West Show.

Uncle Bill had enrolled me in Woods Business College in Brooklyn. I took a room in a small hotel near the school. When first confronted with the typewriter keyboard and the strange brands of shorthand, I was positive I would never be able to learn either one. But once I began, neither proved very difficult to learn.

In the three months I spent at the school, I saw Ben and my stepfather occasionally. But now that Ma was dead, we didn't seem to have much to say to each other. My stepfather was occupied with his increasing business interests, and Ben had made friends at his school and in his neighborhood. He remembered nothing at all of the Cross-Up, yet the Cross-Up to me was still a vivid image that I could bring into focus at the instant of thinking of it. I felt a little guilty that I saw Ben so seldom.

To finish the business course in which the Colonel had enrolled me, I should have stayed another three months. But the city's noise and smells, the tiresome pounding of a typewriter and making Pittman's queer marks grew too much for me. I rejoined the Show at Peru, Illinois.

The Colonel greeted me warmly. "Yuh finished school?" he asked.

"Yessir," I told him.

"An' yuh got a diploma?"

"They're getting it engraved," I told him.

Luckily he didn't pursue the subject. And, as I found out in working as the Colonel's secretary, my knowledge was sufficient to handle his correspondence. He hated to dictate, and his words came slowly and haltingly. Getting things on paper always scared him, I guess. It soon worked out that he would tell me what he wanted said, and I'd phrase it myself.

As he had promised, I now had charge of the Indians too. There were probably forty of them along, all Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

They didn't prove difficult. They'd come to me with their problems, which were seldom big ones. They'd want an advance on their pay to buy gaudy shirts, or new pants, or to buy the bells they called "tinkles."

They strung the tinkles around their ankles for the war dances, and some of them hung long strings of them on their horses. They were delighted with the tinkling sound as they moved, and would keep continually moving a little so that the ringing would continue.

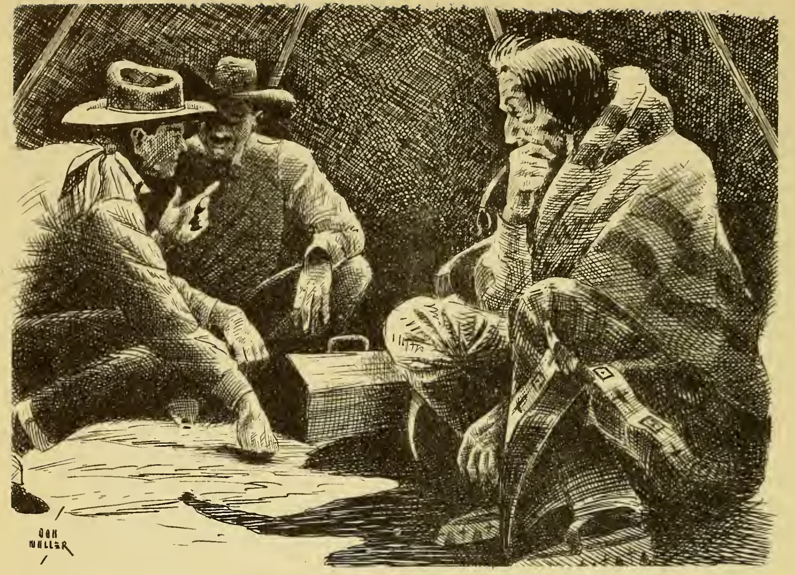
Once in a while an Indian would get homesick and want to be sent back to the Reservation. There were few occasions when I wasn't able to persuade the homesick ones that it was better to stay out the season so that when he got back to the Reservation he'd have a load of cash with which to make the other braves jealous.

The squaws gave us no trouble. They never spoke. They were completely under the control of their men, and would no more have thought to complain to me than they would have thought of striking a man. Probably my most important task was to watch after the Indians' health, particularly the children's. They were always eating or being fed unaccustomed things, and I frequently needed to call on Dr. Hayes, the Show doctor, to ease an Indian child's stomachache.

The Indians were kept apart from the other Show personnel. They had their own tables at feeding time and their own sleeping car. I think they wanted that.

I remember one time when Irontail, the Indian chief, got sick. One of the braves came to tell me about it, and I called Dr. Hayes. We went together to Irontail's lodge. His copper-colored face was crinkled with pain lines, but he uttered no sound. When Dr. Hayes moved close to examine him, he grunted, "Ugh. Go way. Got medicine man."

It was true. The medicine man had a queer collection of feathers, bits of bones, old claws, and unrecog-



We went together to Irontail's lodge. His copper-colored face was crinkled with pain.

nizable things. Over them he incanted monotonously. Yet he also observed us fearfully out of the corner of his eye.

I tried to persuade Irontail to let Dr. Hayes examine and prescribe for him, but he obstinately refused the physician's services. After a half hour of this Dr. Hayes spread his hands helplessly and took his departure.

I turned back to Irontail. "How long you feel bad, Irontail?"

"Three suns," he said.

"How long medicine man try make you feel good again?"

"Two suns," he answered.

"You feel better now?"

"Ugh! No — — still feel bad."

"Maybe medicine man no good. Maybe his medicine not strong medicine for you."

Irontail opened his eyes. He turned his head and viewed his medicine man. "Maybe you speak straight tongue," Irontail said.

"Dr. Hayes got strong medicine. Maybe his medicine heap good for Irontail."

Irontail thought it over for several minutes. "Maybe," he said then.

"I'll bring back white medicine man," I said.

Dr. Hayes succeeded in getting Irontail back on his feet in one day. The chief's illness had been just another upset stomach. After that episode Irontail co-operated more freely with me, which made my job easier.

As the Colonel's secretary, I got a more complete picture of his financial entanglements. The Big Horn projects continued to cost him money. May's demands for new funds were almost as regular as clockwork. Dyer kept calling for more machinery at the Oracle mine. Once Uncle Bill, in desperation at a new call from Dyer for money, sent Johnny Baker out to the mine to see what he could find. Johnny found plenty.

Colonel Dyer had thirty men on the mine payroll. Not more than eight worked regularly. Dyer, Johnny pointed out, wasn't crooked — just inefficient. Some tailings had been taken out of the mine, but there was no profit for the Colonel in that because Dyer's expensive machinery was the wrong kind. Uncle Bill had me write letters to two mining engineering firms to ask that surveys be made of the Oracle. As I wrote the letters I hoped that their reports would either persuade the Colonel to drop the mine altogether or promise a quick return.

The Show was paying its own way, and Pawnee Bill was hopeful that the next season would prove a better one. In spite of my dislike for what Pawnee Bill had made of the Show, I had to admire his business qualities. He was sharp. He managed to spend less on the combined Shows than Uncle Bill had ever spent on the Wild West alone.

Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill were an odd contrast. The Colonel was tall and straight, his nose well-shaped and sharp, his mouth firm and nicely molded, his beard, now nearly snow white, neat and carefully trimmed. In spite of the years that had piled on his shoulders, he was still attractive. He made friends with men easily, and he was the target for almost every woman who saw him — I well knew that.

Pawnee Bill, whose real name was Gordon Lillie, was short and stout. His full face was always red, yet I never knew him to take more than one drink at a sitting. He wore a wide, straggling moustache, and his hair long. He affected buckskins and a fancy ornamented Stetson sombrero. He looked as though he were masquerading as a frontiersman.

Actually he had been one. He had been in the army, where he had held the rank of Major. For several years he had acted as interpreter for the Pawnee Indians of Oklahoma. Years before, he had entered the show business with a party of Pawnees that he brought to Uncle Bill's Show.

He hadn't stayed long with the Colonel. His coldly calculating mind saw the possibilities in another show to rival the Wild West, and he had organized Pawnee Bill's Far East Show. The Far East Show, to live up to its name, had camels, elephants, and Orientals on its payroll, but its real purpose was to fatten on the audience that had been interested by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. To enhance his spectator interest Pawnee Bill had repeatedly raided Uncle Bill's Show for his top performers. Pawnee Bill's most conspicuous success at raiding had been achieved when he had persuaded Annie Oakley to desert the Colonel. Lillie's show had been a paying venture and had run for years. But perhaps he too had felt the loss at the money wagon with the falling off of interest in Wild West Shows. Over the years his show had never been the big money winner that the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show had been. When the opportunity offered to purchase the Bailey notes and secure a controlling interest in Uncle Bill's Show he had tied onto it hard and fast.

Although the audiences were often slim that year of 1909, the Show paid a small profit, and Major Lillie was quite enthusiastic as he built plans for 1910. But Uncle Bill's income from the Show was considerably less than usual, and during that year he personally went deeper into debt.

It was early September when we came to Ottumwa, Iowa. Ottumwa was the center of a rich farming region and the crowds we expected there happily materialized. The afternoon Show was reasonably well filled, and we played the night Show to a packed house in spite of weather that through the evening became more threatening.

Though lightning streaked the sky throughout most of the performance, we completed the finale before the first wind-driven rain fell. Under the threat of the storm few of the audience lingered to see the ever-romantic job of tearing down tents and loading the

Show's railroad cars. The performers were no less eager to desert the Show grounds and get to the shelter of the cars. I lingered only long enough to make sure that the Indians were all accounted for and on their way to their car.

I hardly got wet while I took care of these duties. But the lightning tore jagged holes over the whole sky, and the air was quite dead at one moment and in the next driven in a whirlwind fashion. Under its force I saw a flapping end of our great canvas in a single instant torn loose and driven a hundred yards before the gust died and let it drop limply to the ground.

I hurried to the side-tracked personnel train, glad tonight that I wasn't a canvasman or a razorback.

When I gained the privilege car for sandwiches and coffee, there still had been no amount of rain, just the promise of rough weather in the sudden strong gusts of wind and the sudden, hot quietness that followed each time.

In the privilege car we congratulated each other that the performance was over. The old timers talked of the havoc that had followed other storms. One old puncher said hopefully, "I've seen it look like this before. Most of the time it blows over with hardly any rain or damage." I finished my sandwich and coffee and walked past the sleepers to Uncle Bill's car.

He had a drink beside him but was paying it little attention. "How's it look out there, Dan?" he asked.

"It looks like a bad storm, Colonel," I said. "But maybe it'll blow over."

"I sure hope so," he said. "Weather like this always makes me fidgety while the canvas's still up."

I nodded, understanding. I had seen one or two bad storms while I'd been with the Show. "You want me for anything, Colonel?"

"You in a hurry?" he asked.

"Well, no," I said.

"Maybe there's a poker game yuh'd like t'take a hand in up in the 84-car?"

I grinned. "Maybe," I said.

"Well," he said, "there ain't much. I got a report from one of the mine surveys. We'll send 'em a check. An' May wants eight hundred for a new roof for the Wapiti. We take care o' that an' I guess yuh can go and lose yuhr shirt if yuh want to."

"What does the survey say?" I asked.

He picked up the opened letter and scanned it. "They say maybe we can take $3,500,000 outa the Oracle if we put in the right machinery."

He didn't seem enthusiastic.

"That sounds good," I said.

"Yeah," the Colonel said uncertainly. "The kicker is that they say the machinery will cost another $50,000. I'll have t'get somebody else t'invest in it. I can't swing no $50,000 now."

On my way back I found the privilege car practically deserted. I went on to the 84-car, and as usual there was a poker game in full swing. The seats about the makeshift table were filled, and I stood in back of Tom Eckert, the star bronc rider, and watched the run of the hands.

The storm still threatened outside. Once in a while the lightning flashes would light up the interior of the car far brighter than the oil lamps. Now and then the strong wind would shake the heavy car so that it rocked noticeably.

I never did get into that game. There came a blinding flash of lightning, followed immediately by thunder that roared like all the pits of hell. And then the cyclone struck. We heard timbers blown from a flatcar crack like matchsticks.

The poker game was forgotten. The cowpuncher showmen did not pause to find protective clothing. They dropped their cards and rushed out of the car. The thought in all our minds was to see to the stock. We hightailed it up the rise of ground the short distance to the showgrounds. The rain drove at us in slanting sheets that drenched us the moment we stepped from the car steps. The strong flashes followed one after another, and there was a continuous rolling roar from the torn sky.

In the lightning flashes we saw that the canvas was down, but that it hadn't been taken down by the canvasmen was evident in the shredded bits that whipped about from ropes still fast to poles. The stock were loose, and in the flashes we could see the bewildered horses and buffalo racing around and the tropic weatherwise camels and elephants standing with their tails to the gusty blows of the wind. The canvas had blown down the hill to the town, and the stock in their aimless plunges also tended that way.

Then the lightning and the thunder stopped, as though they had ceased on signal. Through the resulting darkness we struggled desperately against the cyclone force. The rain continued to drive at us. I could see nothing. I struggled ahead.

A horse's shoulder brushed against me and instinctively I reached up and clutched a handful of mane. Under my hand I could feel the horse trembling. I spoke to him in the soothing vernacular of the cow country and he quieted a little.

After a moment of patting and soft-speaking, I took a firm grasp of his mane and leaped astride him. He went forward, at first hesitatingly under my urging, and then, as confidence was restored now that a man was in command, readily. He didn't at all fight the halter-shank that was all I had to control him.

The rain kept up its streaming but now, its damage done, the wind settled. I thought vaguely I ought to round up stock and keep them together. But it seemed hopeless in the pitch darkness of the rain-beaten night. Then, on the lot, they got a kerosene flare going, and I could make out vague shadows moving through the rain and the dark.

I picked on a horse's shadow, persuaded my mount to approach him easily while I spoke soothingly. I patted the flank that twitched nervously under my hand, and gradually worked my way along its length till I could reach the leadrope hanging from his halter.

In the rain-curtained glow from the kerosene flares, I could see that the Show's old hands had started to bring about order. Already two of the cowpunchers had strung a rope corral and were riding slowly around the half dozen head already recovered. I turned my lead horse over to them and started searching for more.

While invading the darkness at the edge of the light cast by the flickering torches — four of them now had been lighted — I almost ran down someone who was on foot.

"Easy theah!" he called and reached a hand toward my horse's head.

"Uncle Bill!" I cried. I slid off the horse's back and grasped his elbow. "This is no place for you. Besides, we're beginning to get things under control."

In the faint light thrown by the torches, I could see the rain streaming from the end of his beard. He was soaked and the clothes clung closely to his body. I thought he shivered as he stood there.

"Yuh think things'll be all right, boy?"

"Sure," I answered. "They're already under control. You go back to your car before you get a good chill."

He put his hand on my arm. "All right, Dan," he said docilely. "But yuh let me know if things go bad."

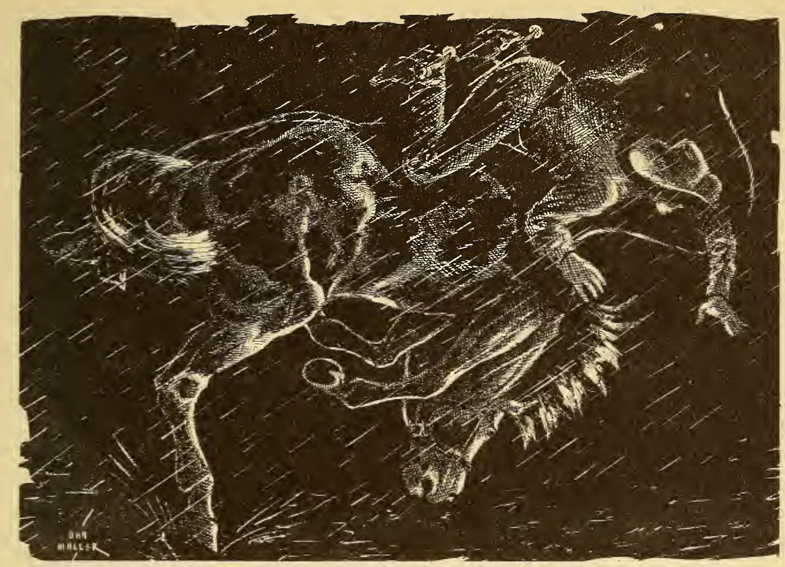
"Yessir," I answered. "I sure will, Colonel."

While I stood watching him edge uncertainly for the shelter of his car, my horse jerked loose. He headed for the corral and I didn't try to follow, but wallowed along in the mud and dark until I brushed against another horse. This horse leaped away in the direction of the corral and I slowly approached him, edging him toward the rope corral, where they took him in charge.

In that darkness beyond the range of the flares, I slogged for some time through the Iowa black mud before I again fetched up against a horse. This time my hand first closed on the halter. I soothed him for half a minute, then grasped his mane and leaped onto his back.

But this was no riding horse. Instead I had run into one of the bucking string. For a moment, in spite of his twisting and bucking I stayed on, but the hair-wet back was slippery. I felt myself flying through the air.

The next I remember is waking up in the Cody car. Every bone and muscle ached and, when I moved, pains in my side and back shot excruciating messages of protest to my head. My nose had been broken too. That



The hair-wet back was slippery. I felt myself flying through the air.

crazy bronc apparently had trampled all over me after he'd finished piling me from his back.

Our torn canvas and other storm damage prevented our keeping our next Show date, but the experienced canvasmen within a day had us ready to finish the season. We'd lost three horses, a buffalo, and a couple of camels. I found myself wishing it'd been the Hindus and Lillie that we'd lost instead.

I don't think I'll ever forget that night in Ottumwa. If I should, I'll be reminded by the reflection of my dented nose every time I look in a mirror.

CHAPTER

21

From Sawdust to Sagebrush

MAJOR BURKE, the Show's publicity man, who in the late years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century was often described as the world's best procurer of publicity, had dreamed up a new gimmick to bring the throng clamoring to the ticket booths. It wasn't new, because Sarah Bernhardt's press people had done it before. It was a farewell tour. Major Burke had figured that it was good for at least three years, since, in that space of time, the Show could play good towns without ever repeating a booking.

Burke's publicity was magnificent. The "Last of the Great Scouts, Buffalo Bill, makes a Grand Farewell Tour of the United States." The people of the towns along the route were warned that this would be their last chance to see the greatest Plainsman of the Old West. Buffalo Bill would positively retire after this season.

Pawnee Bill thought well of the farewell publicity, too, and his parsimony cracked to the extent that he bought a lot of new tinsel, programmed more pageantry, and even added three acts. But the new acts were not Wild West.

The publicity program worked. All through that summer we played to full houses. The Colonel was very happy. He was nearly the man he had been when I had first come to Scout's Rest. He was expansive, he drank a lot, and he was always ready to tell a story of the old days as a Scout for Carr, Sheridan, Miles, and the other army generals, of the Pony Express days when he was known as the "Office Boy on Horseback" for the Russell, Majors, and Waddel firm of freighters in the mid-nineteenth century. Several times I heard him retell the Tall Bull story, originally dreamed up by Buntline or one of his other romantic chroniclers, to which there wasn't a word of truth. That story may be the basis for the designation of an exaggerated tale as "Tall Bull."

Several times before the start of a show, the Colonel would send me to make an estimate of the filled seats. He would beam at the favorable reports I brought, pour himself another drink, and forget his rheumatism enough to stride widely and dramatically from wall to wall of his dressing tent. And though when his cue came to make his appearance he was often very high, it was seldom that Pawnee Bill had to substitute for him.

I don't think the Colonel liked what his Show had become any better than I. He liked neither the smell nor the sight of the camels and bulls (elephants). And as for the Indian fakirs and small, sturdy acrobats, he had for them nothing but contempt. One night he said to me, "Dan, the old Show ain't the same. It ain't the Wild West any more. It's nothin' but a damn' circus. Hell, it don't even have a horse smell about it. Yuh can't smell a damn' thing but those sonabitchin' camels."

But he was happy about the good business. He complained less fretfully at the demands for money from May Decker for the Big Horns and Dyer for the gold mines. He even dreamed up a new idea—that he should make the Big Horns into a vast tourist paradise, where the flavor of the West, judiciously softened for the tenderfoot, would attract easterners in great hordes.

If he noticed that Dyer's and May's demands were higher than in the poorer past years of Show business, he gave no indication.

I don't suppose I was ever a real showman. The flamboyant deception of the Show, after its first enthrallment, held little excitement for me. I suppose I rebelled at the sham of the Show.

If it was the sham that repelled me, it was all the more odd that my particular buddy with the show should be the star bronc-rider, Tom Eckert. Tom wasn't a cowboy. He came originally from Pennsylvania, I believe, and this was his first year with the Show. If he wasn't a cowpuncher, he was a showman. Sy Compton, the chief of the cowboys, soon recognized Tom's worth and assigned him to Hightower, the most vicious and colorful horse in the Show's bucking string. Tom and Hightower became a team that held the audience spellbound.

To make the sight more entertaining, Hightower was always saddled in the arena where he was the sole occupant. The other horses had been bucked out. Saddling a horse in a chute nowadays is relatively easy, for the horse cannot turn or rear. Hightower was hazed out in the open arena in front of the grandstand. Then, after all eyes were fastened on the spirited, fretful, gray bronc, the lead rider drew close and snubbed him to the saddle horn. This brought Hightower's head close to the mounted man, who grasped Hightower's ears and brought the bronc's head over his own horse's neck. The ears are a horse's tenderest part, and Hightower would stand, nervously docile, while Tom came out into the arena carrying his saddle. When the saddle was thrown over his back Hightower would move restively, and severe pressure on his ears was needed before Tom could finish his saddling. Even at that, many's the time Hightower climbed the horse of the man who was earing him down.

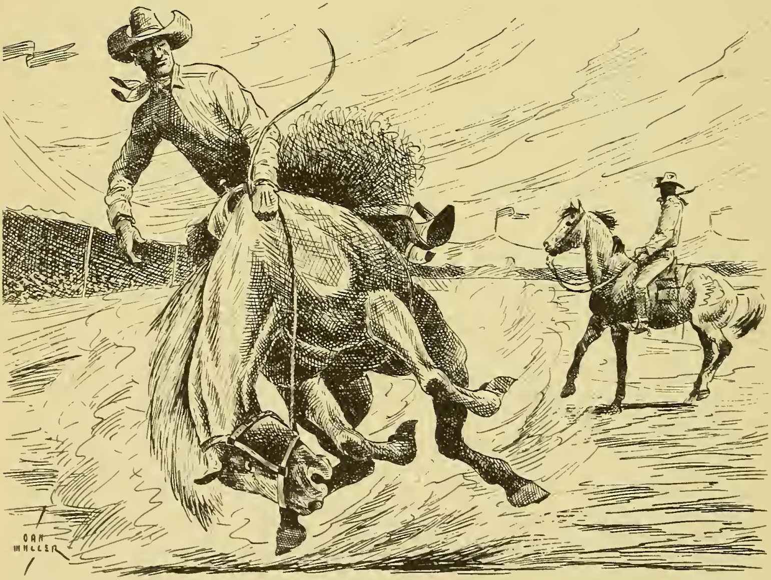
The next move was for Tom to gather a close grip on the halter-shank, place his foot in the stirrup, and signal for Hightower's release.

That was Hightower's moment. He exploded, high, wide, and handsome, and during that initial expenditure of terrific action, Tom's legs and free hand swung wide, up, and over the bronc's back. The few minutes of bucking and riding were as colorful an event as was carried on the Show's bill. Through it all Tom stayed tenaciously on Hightower's back, rowelling him into more furious action at the same time that he nonchalantly waved his black Stetson to the crowd.

Tall, dark, and wearing white Angora Chaps and a red shirt, Tom was as pretty a picture of the romantic

West as any I've seen. I regretted sometimes that his flavor was sham. But we became good friends. Tom drank a good bit, and Sy Compton, who was quite a lot older, tried to persuade him to cut down on the liquor. This proved of no avail, and Sy took to bawling him out. It became something of a feud, with Tom drinking, and Sy frowning on him, unwilling to let him go because of the colorful act Tom put on.

On the grounds in Denver, where we arrived in the middle of August, we met Jim McDonald who a number of years before had been a member of the Show's cowboy troupe. Jim had been to visit and have a drink with the Colonel. He invited Tom and me to town to see a little life. Well, in those days Denver had plenty of life. Jim took us to the gilded places of sin along



That was Hightower's moment. He exploded, high, wide, and handsome.

Market street. Between drinks (I still didn't drink) Jim talked of his ranch, which lay a little over the Divide. He had a cavvy of horses that needed breaking, he told us. What he didn't tell us was that the ranch lay so far off the beaten track that he couldn't get hands.

Our personally conducted pleasure tour kept us from making the evening performance. That wasn't important in my own case, but it was serious for the star bronc-rider to miss the show. When we arrived back on the lot, Sy gave Tom hell. Tom interrupted him.

"I quit!" he shouted. "Take your damn' Show an' stick it. I'm through!"

Jim McDonald, who had come back to the lot with us, smiled with a pleased expression. "Don't yuh fret, Tom," he said. "Why don't you and Dan come on out to my ranch and break my hosses? Sure be willin' t'pay well for it."

I wasn't sure I should go. I talked it over with the Colonel.

"Well," he said, "yuh ain't enjoyin' no more'n I am this freak Show we're puttin' on, I kinda hate t'be without yuh, Dan, but maybe it'll be good for yuh t'get away for a while."

"I guess I hadn't better," I said reluctantly. "Maybe you'll need me."

"Sure I do," he laughed. "I need Tom Eckert, too, but he's goin'. It'll be a good fling for yuh both. Come next year, Tom'll be ready t'come back with the Show, an' he's a good attraction. Yuh'll really be doin' me a favor by riding herd on Tom and persuadin' him—when the right time comes—he oughta be back with the Show. Yuh wanta go, Dan, and if yuh'll work on Tom it'll be well worth while."

I smiled at Uncle Bill, relieved. I really did want to get away from the camel smell, to see and live in the mountains again, to get away from people drinking and —and just people.

"Thanks, Uncle Bill," I said.

" 'Sall right, Dan. Yuh go an' enjoy yuhrself. Now if you boys go broke—an' I 'spect yuh will—yuh wire me an' I'll send yuh money t'either come back t'the Show or get up t'the TE with." He held out his hand. "Have a good time, Dan."

"Yessir," I said. "I'll sure work at it."

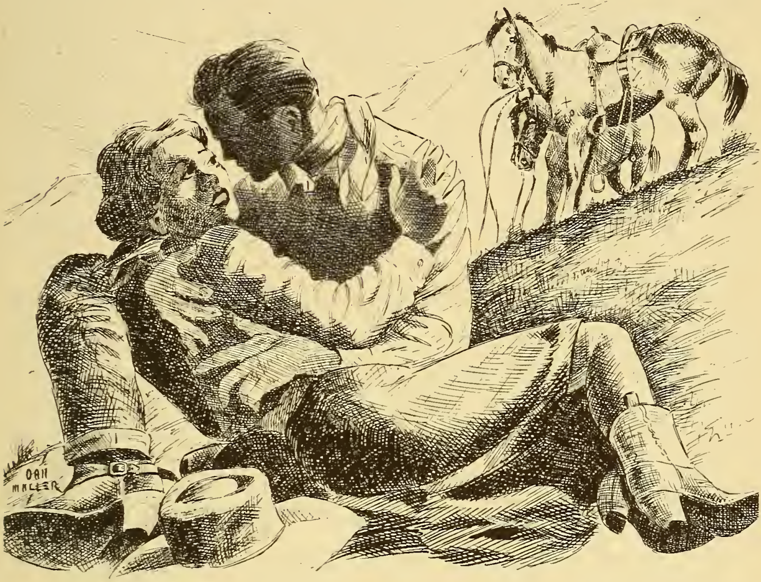
Jim McDonald's ranch lay over the Divide and across the Blue River near Kremmling. Jim had got himself together a pretty good outfit, but I realized when I got there that his remote location made it hard for him to get horsebreakers.

I made a discovery after we started breaking those horses. Tom Eckert was a good showman, but he wasn't much of a horsebreaker. It seemed that he'd learned Hightower's every next move, and was prepared for every last buck. It wasn't the same with this genuine wild stock. It turned out that I did most of the breaking.

But we didn't work too hard. Tom and I figured out that three rides were enough to break a horse. If the punchers couldn't ride them then, *they* needed breaking in.

In spite of the isolation and the roughness of our work, I enjoyed being in real cow country. I contrasted the peace of the blue-shaded mountains and their white caps with the blaring of the not-too-musical cowboy band, the tinsel of the Show, the gaudy colors, the gilded wagons, and the special kind of people that went to make up the Show personnel.

Besides, I got interested in one of the girls on the ranch. It was the daughter of McDonald's foreman. I courted her, and I guess she took my protestations of love too seriously. At any rate she started talking about a little place of our own where the mountains were tall, the wages low, and we could start increasing the population. It got too serious for me—after all I was only twenty—and I was very glad when we'd broke the last of Jim's horses.



Besides, I got interested in one of the girls on the ranch.

Tom and I drifted back to Denver. But in Denver there was no holding him. He was out for a lark. He flirted with every girl, drank a lot, and could be expected to pick a fight at every opportunity. In a fight he could hold his own, and unless a friend of the one he picked on tried to take part I was very seldom involved in those fights. But I wanted to get along on more peaceable lines. I decided I'd be better off by myself so we parted.

After leaving Tom in Denver—he promised me he'd write the Colonel about coming back to the Show—I wandered up the course of the Snake River. I found plenty of work breaking horses for the different outfits along the trail. Over the period of the month after I left Tom I drifted back to the Big Horns. I hadn't gone broke. When I returned to Cody I actually had a little poke.

I wanted to avoid May Decker and so I didn't go into the Irma at all. I did go out to the TE and visit Billy Goodfellow, the foreman, and Reckless Davies at his little ranch at Valley. Then I came back to Cody looking for something to do. Tex Holm, whose livery stables rivaled those of John Coleman's, offered me a job guiding in the Yellowstone, and so for the next month and a half I guided people who wanted a man to set up their camps, show them the sights, and even cook for them. Most of the tours were three weeks in length. I picked them up at Tex Holm's stable and we'd ride in White Steamers to the Pahaska Tepee near the entrance to the park, where Tex kept some riding and pack horses stabled.

There was a little time between the last touring party and the return of the Colonel. I saw May once on the street, and decided I could better keep out of her sight and the reach of her bitter tongue by going out to the TE.

That winter at the TE was a repetition of the previous year. The Colonel brought plenty of guests, and a good bit of my time was spent in seeing that they weren't left to remain out in the forty-below weather to die in drunken abandon.

I spent some time with Billy Goodfellow and his Indian wife, Marie. They had a little boy who had about as much Indian blood in him as I had, and I often rode herd on him when Billy and Marie would take in a dance.

I had a few more lawless adventures that year. However, when the companions of my escapade of the year before were caught in the act of rustling, and were sent for a term of years to the Deer Lodge Penitentiary, where I understand they got to be expert in the making of horse-hair bridles, I became convinced the Colonel was right. Maybe the Law wasn't a thing to get tangled with any more. I suppose this decision was a sign that I had really grown up at last.

The Colonel was quite excited by the successes in the 1910 season. He was full of Pawnee Bill's praises, and spoke only now and then of the Far Eastern part of the Show and its unsavory smells and people. He now had a new horse that he had named Isham for Bob Isham, the sheriff, who gave it to him. Bob had once been foreman at the TE and was a great admirer of the Colonel's.

When the Colonel told his stories to the companions of his drinking hours, it seemed to me that he was less able than formerly to tell fact from the adventures dreamed up for him by Ned Buntline, his press agent Major Burke, and other romantic chroniclers.

In earlier years I had heard the Colonel laugh uproariously at some of the fantastic legends that had been written of him. His sister, Helen Cody Wetmore, in her biography of Buffalo Bill, wrote several episodes that were no more than legends. On the occasions of her visits to Scout's Rest and the TE the Colonel had often joshed her about retelling these fanciful lies.

Although, at times, particularly when he was drinking, he now seemed to believe in those stories himself, there were other times when he was as openly contemptuous as before of the legends.

It was no more, I think, than that the Colonel was growing a little old.

In that winter at the TE he was more often occupied with wild plans for making new fortunes. He had retained his dream of the summer before of making the Big Horns into a vast health and dude area that would make him wealthy again.

And he never tired of pointing out that his dream of irrigating the Big Horns had come true. Although he had failed in bringing that dream to realization, the government's Shoshone Dam had gone into operation in 1910, and the plans he had laid for the Big Horns' farming were now being realized. However, Uncle Bill, who had spent in the neighborhood of a million dollars to bring that dream to fruition, shared no part of the wealth that resulted.

I think he did not too much regret the enormous expenditures that had proved to be losses. He was compensated that the dream itself had been realized.

CHAPTER
22

Tammen Gets His Foot in the Door

AT the end of our stay at the TE before the opening of the 1911 season, it seemed to me that Uncle Bill was more tractable when Reckless Davies started in his sobering-up regime. He hardly protested the smallness of the drinks, he asked me less often to sneak him an extra shot. When Reckless was ready to move him over to the De Maris Hot Springs for a two-weeks' boiling out period, he seemed mentally to be in shape to start the season. But he appeared weaker, to tire more quickly than he had in the past. Arthritis stiffened his hands and legs, and he had acquired a pain in the prostate.

After we began the season these things continued to cause him trouble, and before the season was five weeks old we had added a man to the staff whose sole duty was to act as the Colonel's valet and masseur. Even so, Pawnee Bill was called upon to substitute for him more often than the year before.

Perhaps the Colonel's lackluster attitude and poor health were emphasized by poor business. Principally, I think, it was a matter of booking. Apparently the crop reports of the year before had been ignored, and much of our itinerary was through sections that had suffered crop failures. But the worst judgment of all was that we played many of the same towns we had played the year before. And the people resented being told a second year that this was "positively the last chance to see Buffalo Bill." They stayed away, it seemed to the Colonel and me, as enthusiastically as they had thronged the grounds the year before.

Pawnee Bill, as astute a showman as he had proved himself to be, did not seem to realize the causes of our poor audiences. In his conferences with the Colonel where I listened in, he repeated hopefully again and again that the season would improve, that we had just run into a string of bad luck.

"If we only had Nate Salsbury again," the Colonel complained to me once. "Nate'd take care of changin' the bookin' so we'd begin t'get decent audiences. The trouble with Lillie is he ain't got no imagination."

May Decker's demands for money for the Colonel's remaining holdings in the Big Horns and Dyer's for new machinery never seemed to cease. Instead, in spite of Uncle Bill's having me write them that it was a bad year, their cries for money came more often than they had the year before. The Colonel just managed to meet the call on one note by taking out another, and it was getting harder and harder for him to wangle new loans. And the duns from the lithographers and feed dealers kept getting more and more final in their severity.

The twenty-four-hour man, who went ahead of the show to prepare for its arrival, once suggested a little deal that made him and me a little money. Back with the Show for a day to receive new instructions, he happened to see me doing some lettering for one of the Show cages.

"You do a nice job," he commented, as I completed a flourish on a "T."

I thanked him and kept on with the lettering. "Maybe," he said, "you and I could make a little money."

I stopped working. "How?" I asked.

"We could carry merchants' advertising banners in the parade on the elephants and camels and on some of the cage wagons. I could get the orders for 'em and you could paint 'em. We might be able to do pretty well."

"You're in a town only a few hours before we get there. How could we get the signs painted in time?"

"I'd wire you what's to go on 'em."

I continued with my work. It seemed like a good idea. Of course Pawnee Bill would try to take a share, but we might be able, with the Colonel's help, to keep from dividing with him.

"Of course," the twenty-four-hour man pointed out, "the hardest part of the business will be getting the merchants to advertise. We could divide the take, sixty-forty."

"No," I said decidedly. "We divide even or no dice."

He laughed. "All right, Dan."

We didn't make a great deal on the advertising. For one thing the cost of the small rolls of muslin on which the signs were painted was quite high. Later I discovered that I could buy it cheaper in sixty- and hundred-yard rolls.

My fear that Pawnee Bill would try to rake a percentage of the take was well founded. But when I explained the business to Uncle Bill, he put his foot down and we were able to keep all of what we made. It wasn't a large amount, but it enabled me, in spite of poker losses in the 84-car, to finish up the season with quite a sizeable poke.

The Colonel, for him, had drunk quite moderately during the season. Toward the end of September he began counting the days before he could get back to the TE and go on a rousing drunk. When we closed he was ready to make a beeline for the Big Horns.

A winter at the TE taking care of the Colonel's drunken guests didn't appeal to me much. I had the little poke I'd made with the sign painting tucked away, and besides that an agent had offered to team me up with a girl on the Orpheum vaudeville circuit for ten weeks. The girl was to be pure decoration. The act was my drawing.

I'd invented a method—I don't suppose I was the first to do it, but I never saw anyone else do it before—of making quick drawings. It was simple because I based my drawing on angles. For instance, I found that a steer's head could be sketched in quickly by first making a triangle and adding the ears, horns, eyes, and mouth to that. A full sketch of a horse or cow could be done in the same way by the use of an oblong. Having once doped out the method, I could draw a good likeness with lightning speed.

I asked the Colonel if he would mind if I took the booking offered. He was pleased that I wanted to strike out for myself.

"Among all the people I know," he said, "you, Johnny Baker, and Major Burke are the only ones who ain't always askin' me for help. Yuh go ahead, my boy. But if the goin' gets tough, remember t'call on me."

"I think I can make a go of it," I told him. "I got a little saved from the sign painting, too. So if things do go bad I'll be all right."

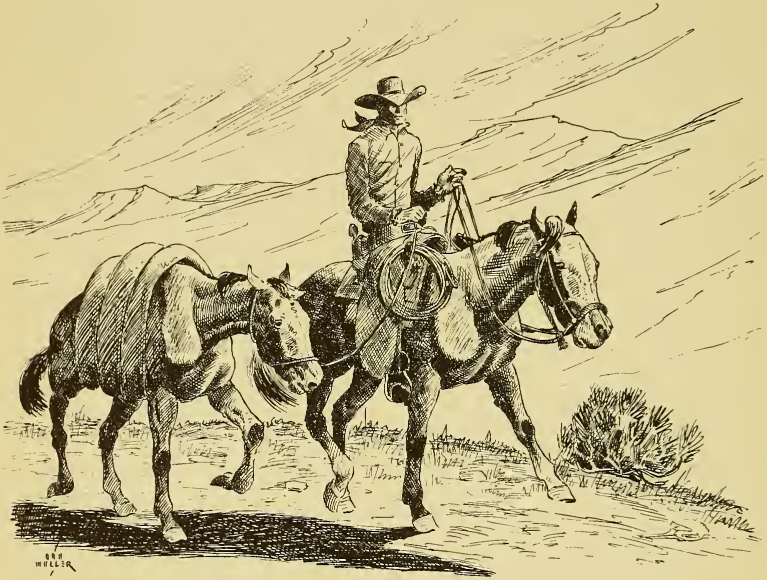
"When yuh think yuh'll get back t'the TE?"

"If you don't mind, sir," I said hesitantly, "I'd kinda like to strike out in the range country for myself for the winter. You remember when you bawled me out for the rustling, you said that might be a good idea?"

He laughed. "I sure do, Dan boy. An' it is a good idea. Yuh remind me more and more of yuhr Pa. He wasn't one to depend on others either. He wanted t'be on his own." He sighed and looked at the side of his tent for a moment, as though he were seeing there something like the new motion pictures. "I wish my own flesh and blood was more like that. I wish they was more able t'depend on themselves . . ." His eyes came back and focused on me. "But remember, Dan, if things don't pan out good for yuh, yuh send me a wire."

The ten weeks of vaudeville booking were fun. But it was much the same as the Show, moving from one town to another and people looking at you all the time. At the end of the ten weeks the circuit offered me another ten weeks' booking, but I refused. My girl partner was mad at me for that, and I didn't blame her. She wanted to go places in Show business. I didn't. So, though she cried and said I was a brute for not going on when I had the opportunity, I stopped the rapid sketching when I'd finished my ten weeks.

I bought two horses at a livery stable in Denver, and from there I struck out south. I wasn't in any hurry.



I bought two horses at a livery stable in Denver, and from there I struck out south.

I'd ride into a ranch and find they had some horses they wanted broke, and I'd finish up their cavvy and move on.

I began to relax. It felt good. I didn't have to keep track of time. If darkness found me on the trail miles from habitation, I hobbled my horses, took off my pack and saddle, and bedded down for the night right there.

The air was crisp south of Denver and most of the time there was a little breeze. The sky was azure and the few clouds—fleecy, opalescent, and milky white—were like so much popcorn before it was buttered. The distant sandhills were gold-colored, with purple shadows.

I'd hobble my horses, unpack my water colors and paper, and paint the scenes I saw.

Twice, when I painted where men passed by, I sold my pictures. The amounts were small, but I was not concerned with money. That my poke grew thinner as I drew on it made no difference. If I wanted money there was work for one who knew horses on any of the ranches scattered in the unfenced range. Sometimes the call to move hit me so hard that I wouldn't even wait for my time.

Once in a while I painted a card and sent it to the Colonel. I didn't hear from him until March. He wrote:

> Dear Dan:
>
> Thanks for the cards. I want you to keep in touch with me as I don't just know what will be my movements. Something might come about so I would want you with me. Wherever you can, brush up on your shorthand. Let me know if you need money.
>
> Good luck,
> Col.

I awoke quite suddenly to the fact that up in the Big Horns Reckless would be putting the finishing touches on Uncle Bill's spring cure. Like a child the Colonel would be excited by the adventures promised by this new year. He would have dream-hatched plans for the Show and for the other ventures that would recoup his fortunes. In them he would need me. And now I wanted to go back.

I sold my horses, and, with what I had left of the poke, I had more than enough to get me back to the Big Horns.

The year 1912 was another bad year at the box office. The Colonel was striving still under the blows of a world that now sometimes laughed at him. The "farewell" tour of Buffalo Bill had become a recurrent joke that elicited only guffaws. Oddly the Colonel's repetitive farewell was less acceptable to Americans than that of the faded Bernhardt or the canny Lauder. But we struggled on through the season, the Colonel flinching before the sight of empty seats, but playing his role as only a born showman would. I've often thought of what courage it took for him to carry on as he did.

Often he was unable to make his announcements, and in these lapses Pawnee Bill took his place, as he so very often did with the sole remaining act that the Colonel put on. Inebriated or sick, as the Colonel often was, he could still shoot better than Pawnee Bill.

Harry Tammen contributed a measure to the Show's lack of success. Tammen and Bonfils owned, as well as the *Denver Post,* the Sells-Floto circus. They were hungry for names. The name of their Show itself was stolen from a down-and-out but respectable circus family. Tammen wanted to snare the magic of Buffalo Bill's name for his circus, knowing that under the right circumstances, it was still valuable.

The Colonel's dream of buying back his half of the Show from Pawnee Bill with the profits of the season, was lost in the holocaust of bad billing and Bonfils' and Tammen's effort to shove us under water.

Our Show's bills were plastered over with Tammen's lithographs. If Sells-Floto had no actual date to play after our show, their bills were still plastered over ours just to insure for us a season that showed loss.

And the Show did lose money that year. Pawnee Bill, whose forte was saving money, needed often to reach down into his reserves to make up the losses incurred by the Show. He had to if we were to keep on going. The Colonel had no cache to draw on. When the season finally ended we were immersed in gloom.

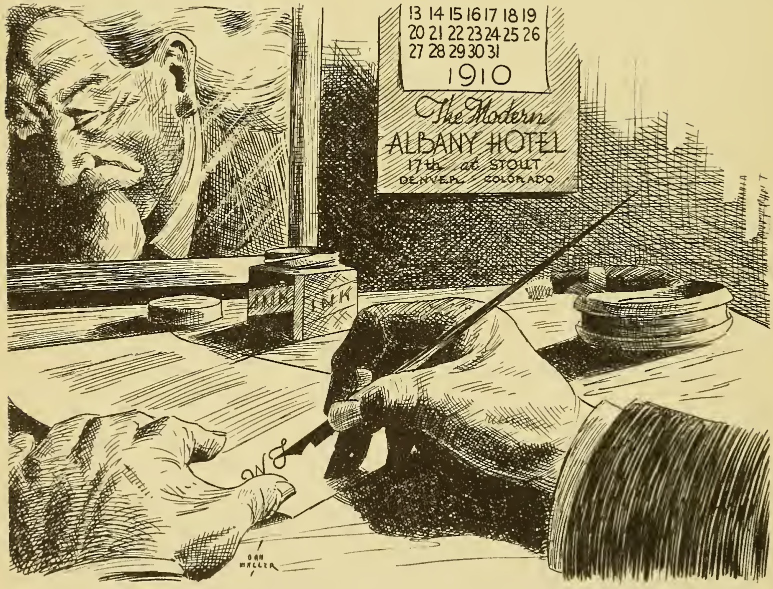
In January, 1913, the Colonel visited Denver on Harry Tammen's invitation. I accompanied him. The Colonel was nervous and distraught. He had been gratefully using his haven at the TE to drown his worries in drinking and yet draw new life from the high mountain air. He was almost sixty-seven years old. Though his strong straight form still stood erect, though his eyes at times still flashed the old fire, he was an old man.

Tammen greeted us cordially—even royally. He put on a party for us, where the liquor flowed as freely as it did at the TE, liquor that had a greater variety and a larger potency—champagne, whiskey, wines of all kinds. Tammen was not only hospitable but respectful, too, to the Colonel's claim to attention. He spoke of the old days of the West, and he flatteringly admired the stories the Colonel told of those days. He spoke of the millionaires' hunting junket that Uncle Bill had guided, of the foray planned for the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia by General Sheridan, who had secured Uncle Bill as the guide so that the Grand Duke's hunting would be sure to be successful.

In that pleasant reminiscent aura of the old days the Colonel expanded visibly. The new caution that had been taught him by these late bad years was forgotten under the wine, whiskey, and flattery.

And ever-present in the Colonel's universe was his need for money to carry on the grand schemes already bankrupt and the new ones dreamed. When Uncle Bill disclosed that he needed money, Tammen was receptive and sympathetic. Of course money could be found for the great Buffalo Bill. Why, all he had to do was to speak!

So Uncle Bill signed a note for another $20,000 using the property but not the name of the Wild West Show as collateral. Tammen didn't mention it, and the Colonel, in his large way, ignored it, but the note contained a clause that separated Buffalo Bill and his name from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So Uncle Bill signed a note for another $20,000.

Pawnee Bill and secured their services for the Sells-Floto circus for the year 1914.

The party was over. The Colonel sobered somewhat, and we made our way up to the Big Horns and the TE, where we finished a winter not unlike those others. I did manage not to care for Uncle Bill's drunken guests by helping to build the ranchhouse at the Bobcat.

CHAPTER

23

The Auctioneer Calls

IT seemed to me that the Colonel didn't respond quite as quickly or as well to Reckless Davies' sobering up regime that spring. He certainly was not in his best Show form when the season opened. His prostate was causing him considerable trouble and his rheumatism was so bad that he found it difficult, even with help, to mount Isham, his horse.

In order to make it easier for him, a phaeton was secured, to which we hitched a couple of beautiful paint ponies. We didn't use this until we started on tour, for there were no parades while we played the Garden. Out on the road, though, the Colonel headed the parade with the phaeton. Even in it he presented a dashing picture to the parade-watchers, the colorful paints dancing restively as he held them back to the pace of the camels and the elephants.

Business had been fair in New York, but as soon as we got on the road our attendance fell off. We had expected a fair share of good Show weather, for we were booked across the country south of the Mason and Dixon Line. Almost unbelievably, it was cold, and throughout the latter part of May, all of June, and the early part of July we experienced cold rains that sometimes actually turned to sleet. Our advance publicity was still pounding away at the "farewell tour"—"your last chance to see Buffalo Bill"—but its appeal had played out.

Twice during that tour of the South, storm winds flattened our canvas and caused other damage. We lost our star bronc rider, but failed to get a replacement. And not long after that we lost a girl trick and bronc rider. She was not replaced either.

To complicate the general air of gloom about the Show and Uncle Bill's deep despondency over his physical condition, Pawnee Bill had learned that the Colonel had signed to play with Sells-Floto in 1914. From the moment he learned that he hardly spoke to the Colonel.

Uncle Bill groaned painfully after an occasion when Pawnee Bill had been curt with him, "It ain't enough that we have poor weather and poor audiences. Lillie's got t'make it worse with his sour face. I'll sure be glad, Dan, when this season's over!"

With his grand roaring voice the Colonel still introduced his "Congress of Rough Riders of the World." Even at his worst moments he was one of the world's great showmen.

The weather made the Colonel's rheumatism worse, of course, and it was often necessary for Pawnee Bill to shoot at the glass balls. After a time, Lillie suggested that he continue to do that, since in the next season he'd have to put on the act regularly.

Pawnee Bill made a good bit of taking over that turn. I heard him a number of times make fun of the Colonel's marksmanship. Once he even made a nasty, joking remark of that color to the Colonel himself.

"Well," the Colonel drawled, "we could shoot a match for a thousand dollars."

Pawnee Bill laughed that off with a false note in his voice and took his departure.

To add to the Colonel's misery, May Decker kept sending letters telling of more losses in the Big Horns. Every letter asked for more money. And to top the bad luck, in late June, Colonel Dyer wrote from Arizona that he was throwing up the sponge at Oracle. He wrote that his last hope was gone—even though he was convinced that paying ore was there. He complained that if he'd had the right backing the Oracle mine now would have been making big money both for Uncle Bill and himself.

But there was more to Dyer's withdrawal than just the loss of money the Colonel had put into the mine. A note of Dyer's that the Colonel had endorsed came due. And, what hurt the Colonel even more, Dyer's departure came at the end of a long period in which the mine employees had gone unpaid.

"Sure is funny, Dan," the Colonel said, sitting limply on his cot after the matinee. "Dyer said the Oracle mine was gonna make us rich. He tol' me he wouldn't draw an easy breath till I was repaid what I backed him with an' had a pokeful o' profits besides."

"I remember," I said.

Uncle Bill crumpled Dyer's letter slowly and let it drop on the ground. "Seems t'me the men o' the West have changed. If an old Westerner gave his word, yuh could depend on him t'try for all he was worth." He lay down on the cot and painfully drew up his rheumatic legs and was silent for a minute or two. I rescued Dyer's letter from the ground for our file. Uncle Bill had closed his eyes, but there was a wrinkle between his brows that showed his thoughts were still on Dyer.

"Yuh know, Dan," he said, "it was diff'rent in the ol' days. A man says he'll do a thing an' yuh could depend on it he'd bust a gut tryin'. He might not do it but it wa'n't fer lack of tryin'. I 'member a time yuhr Pa says he'll pay me back a bit he needs to borry come Christmas. Carl was jus' startin' his Cross-Up brand then. Come Christmas I plumb fergot Carl sayin' he'd be there t'pay me back, an' if I'd thought of it, I'd known he wouldn't come, fer we was havin' a first-rate blizzard when I woke up Christmas mornin'.

"But long 'bout 'leven 'clock I heard a stompin' outside the door, an' afore I can get there t'greet the traveler, why it opens an' it's yuhr Pa. 'Bill,' he says, handin' out a poke, 'here's that money yuh let me have so kindly. Thanks. An' let me know when I can do somethin' fer you.'

"I sure was surprised. 'Yuh mean,' I asks him, 'Yuh mean yuh rode through this here blizzard jus' t'pay me this money?'

" 'Yuh bet,' Carl says. 'I tol' yuh I'd pay yuh Christmas. T'day's Christmas, ain't it?'

"Well, in the old days, the men of the West was like that."

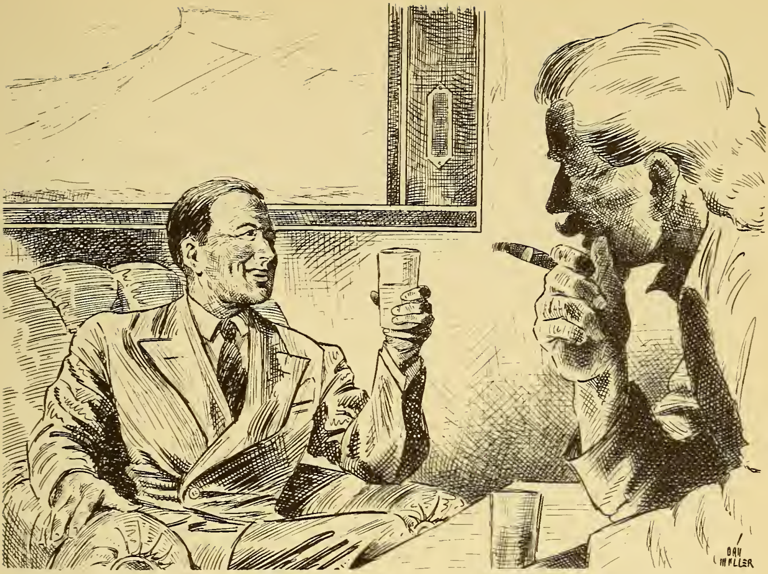
While he talked the wrinkle had disappeared from above his nose. He opened his eyes and smiled. "Yuh're kinda like that, too, Dan. When yuh say somethin' I know it's gonna be that way, come hell or high water."

We came in to our Denver date early in July. We had just completed playing one hundred consecutive engagements, every one of which we had played at a loss. Our canvas was in bad shape from the maulings the high winds had given it, and though we still had the full complement of eighty-four cars in the two sections of our Show train, some of them were lightened because old and damaged equipment and props had been discarded and not replaced along the route.

Tammen's note was overdue, and Denver was the home of Bonfils and Tammen and their *Denver Post* as well as winter quarters for Sells Floto. We hadn't heard from them about the note, but Uncle Bill was afraid we would now that we were in Denver.

There were other worries. Scattered across the country behind us were a great sheaf of feed bills for the mountains of hay, oats, and other fodder we had bought for the stock. And to the lithographing company that did posters, twenty-four-sheets, programs, and other printed matter, we owed somewhere in the neighborhood of $60,000.

It was eleven o'clock that first morning in Denver when Tammen came down to the rail yards to visit in the Cody car. He came in, his usual hearty, bluff self. "Hullo there, Bill," he said and came the length of the car with his hand outstretched. "How's everythin' with the Buffalo Bill Show?"



"Oh, Bill," Tammen said, "I thought I'd ask about that note. It's overdue now, you know."

"Things ain't so good, Harry," the Colonel said. He rose and shook Tammen's hand. "Set down, we'll have a hooker in celebration o' seein' each other again."

"Fine!" Tammen accepted.

I got two drinks together and brought them to their chairs. Tammen lifted his, "Here's how." He swallowed it neat and set the glass on the table at his elbow. The Colonel drank his more slowly.

"Oh, Bill," Tammen said, "I thought I'd ask about that note. It's overdue now, you know."

The Colonel put his glass on the table without finishing it. He neglected to see that Tammen's glass was empty and invite him to have another. "I know," he said. "I've been worryin' 'bout that, Harry. We've had the worst weather I've seen in thirty years o' Show business. T'tell yuh the truth, Harry, we ain't made a cent so far this year. But we will. We're in Denver now, a damn' good Show town, an' our route carries us up into British Columbia where they've had a whackin' good year. We'll make up fer all those bad bookin's an' finish the year with a profit yet. Yuh jus' wait an' see."

Surprisingly Tammen said easily, "Sure yuh will, Bill. Don't you give our little note a second thought. There's plenty of time."

Uncle Bill sat back in his chair and exhausted a deep breath slowly. His eyes brightened. He looked at Tammen and then at his glass.

"Fill up Harry's glass, Dan," he ordered genially. "We want him t'be happy."

After Tammen had left, the Colonel's worries came back. "That ain't much like Tammen and Bonfils," he said wonderingly. "I've kept out o' those boys' hands a-purpose so's they wouldn't have no chance to clamp down on me. An' now that they got the chance they don't do it. Why?"

I didn't know, but I was as suspicious as the Colonel about it. Afterwards I realized they wanted to hit Pawnee Bill too, because he held rights to the name, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.* "Maybe," I suggested, "they got some other scheme. Maybe, because you're going to show for them in Sells-Floto next year, they want to keep you their friend."

The Colonel nodded. "Maybe," he said. "Sounds like somethin' maybe they'd think. But we'd better keep our eyes peeled for trouble."

We set up the Show and played the first afternoon and evening to fair audiences. The Colonel was pleased about that, but decided not to accept any of the invitations that were extended to him from the celebrity hounds. Instead of going back to his car in the yards, he stayed overnight in his tent. I slept in the outer compartment. Both of us, I guess, expected something unfortunate might happen.

The Colonel got up the next morning feeling very chipper. He ate a hearty breakfast. As we walked back to his tent he was almost his old self.

We had almost got back to the tent when he stayed my stride with a grasp on my shoulder. "Wait!" he said tensely.

I followed the direction of his eyes. Coming toward us were four men. Two of them were obvious lawmen, their badges showing as their coats flapped back in their walking. The other two were well groomed and had the falsely brisk appearance of men who work at desks.

The Colonel's pressure on my arm brought me around to face him. "Looks like that's trouble, Dan. You find Tom Smith an' have him get the cash box out o' the money wagon pronto. Maybe we'll be able t'pay off the help anyway."

I found Tom still eating in the cook-house. "Quick!" I said. I put a hand on his shoulder. "The Colonel thinks maybe we've been attached. He wants you to get the cashbox out of the money wagon."

Tom was an old showman. He got to his feet and without seeming to do so, hurried toward the money wagon, with me at his elbow.

But we were too late! Standing guard in front of the padlocked wagon was one of the four men who had startled the Colonel.

Tom put the keys he held back in his pocket.

"Those Show keys?" the sheriff's man asked shrewdly.

"None o' yuhr damn' business," Tom told him.

The deputy smiled grimly. "Yes, it is," he said. "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Far East Show has been attached for debt. Give me those keys."

Tom turned on his heel. "Like hell. Those keys belong to me."

We went to the Colonel's tent. The two office men were there with the sheriff. The Colonel's eyes tried to read from our expressions whether or not we had saved the cash. In Tom's grim expression and my sorrowful one he read the right answer.

"Now, Colonel," one of the office lawyers said, "it's like this. The United States Lithographing Company don't want to close you down. But apparently their only hope of payment is to threaten you with closing the Show. Believe me," he protested quickly, as he saw anger gathering in the Colonel's face, "we have no doubts as to your honesty. But we do know that you have run into a long series of misfortunes. Now if you could manage to pay off this $60,000—" he saw Uncle Bill's inability to do that from his expression, "—or to make a sizeable payment on it, the company will withdraw its attachment and let the Show go on."

"An' if I don't?"

"Then, Colonel, we'll petition for your involuntary bankruptcy. The Show then will be sold at auction."

Uncle Bill could no more have raised $60,000 than he could have flown to the moon. For once he was through even trying. He let matters take their course. Pawnee Bill, too, although he had money—even a good deal of it—including mortgages on Uncle Bill's North Platte and Big Horns property—washed his hands of the matter and went to New Jersey. In some part of the world, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show had played every year since 1883. In July, 1913, its tents were folded, never again to be anything more than part of a circus!

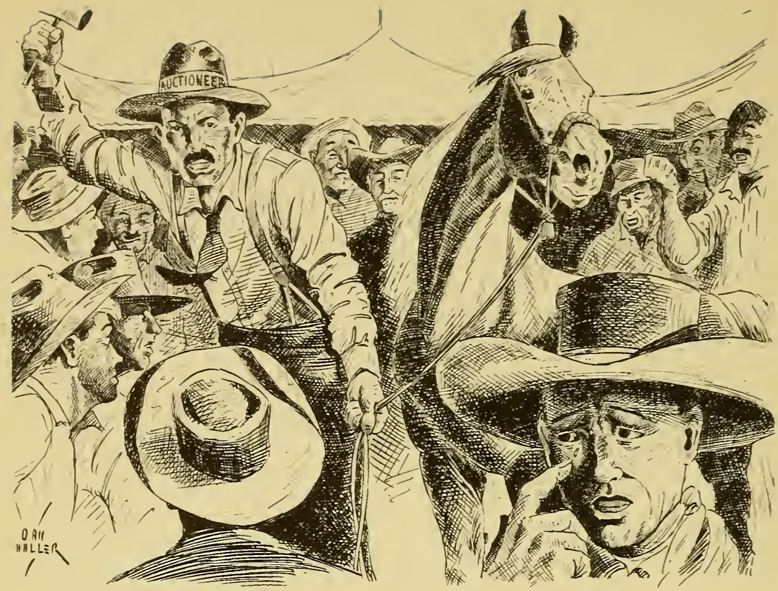
But in the more than a month that we needed to stay in Denver to close up details of losing the Show, a number of curious things resulted. The lithographing company's lawyers in the attachment proceedings were Bonfils' and Tammen's, which of course made me think they wanted the show closed. Within a week of the attachment, Bonfils and Tammen placed another, using the Colonel's $20,000 note as reason. Then they persuaded him that the cause for the close of the Show was Lillie. Uncle Bill started a suit against Pawnee Bill for an accounting of their partnership. And Uncle Bill's lawyers were also Bonfils' and Tammen's.

The sale of Show property did not occur finally until September. The Colonel had spent the interim at various efforts to save the Show. I had been of what help I could. But it all proved fruitless.

We went to the sale together. Uncle Bill left very soon, a depth of pain in his blue eyes that I shall always remember.

Tents, props, railroad cars, stock—everything went under the hammer that day. When Isham came to the block I was nearly sick with anger at myself for not having saved my money so that I could have bought him in for the Colonel. He had been the latest horse in a long series of the Colonel's favorite mounts.

There was a lot of bidding on Isham. He finally was knocked down to a man I recognized as being from



When Isham came to the block I was nearly sick with anger.

North Platte. I was glad of that. I hardly knew the man. But he came from a country that knew horses. Isham would be fairly treated by a North Platte man. I left the sale then.

Two days after the sale the Colonel and I got on the train for Cody. Neither of us was happy, and the Colonel slumped in his seat for long periods without uttering a word. Once he said wistfully, "I never let my people be stranded before. I hope those boys and girls and the Injuns all got back home all right . . . I think me leavin' 'em broke hurts worst of all."

CHAPTER

24

The Sioux's Last Stand in Cinema

THE Colonel didn't go all the way to Cody with me but stopped off to go to North Platte. I wondered about that, for, as far as I knew, he hadn't gone to North Platte in years.

In Cody I escaped seeing May Decker, principally because I stayed in town only long enough to get a horse from Tex Holm for the ride out to the TE.

The Big Horn Basin was beautiful in September. The days were considerably shorter of course than the full summer days, but the trees exhibited the beautiful fall colors and the day's sun was warming without being hot. Once out at the TE, I was captured by the idea that now was the time to do the painting of the ranch buildings Uncle Bill had requested. I dug out my painting materials and found that I had everything I needed for the project. The work went well.

I was on my third day on the painting when Uncle Bill arrived. Wonder of wonders he wasn't clouded with liquor. There was, somehow, a happiness about him that I hadn't seen in a long time. I didn't need to look far for the answer.

Aunt Louisa had come with him!

They both seemed to me extraordinarily happy. Uncle Bill went about the barns with a keen interest in the state of things and the animals. He conferred with Billy Goodfellow about ranch operations. And Aunt Louisa busied herself about the ranchhouse. It was the first time she had been there. There was plenty to occupy her. Not that she upset things. Her whole effort was bent on making things more comfortable. She took a hand in the kitchen. I hadn't eaten such good meals since we'd been together at Scout's Rest.

I don't think the Colonel was ever completely reconciled to the loss of his Wild West Show. But in a measure the gnawing pain of the loss must have been eased when Tex Holm came out from Cody leading Isham. The North Platte man who had bought him at the sheriff's sale was one of the few who showed his appreciation for the help the Colonel had given him—at least I suppose the Colonel at some stage had aided him. Isham had arrived consigned to the Colonel. There was no further word.

The Colonel, without being robbed of time by the haze of drinking, didn't have enough to do and, with restless energy, he decided that we ought to be busy at some scheme. He dreamed up a half dozen roseate ones to work on. One was to combine his interest in the Big

Horns with the De Maris Sulphur Springs and run not only the world's largest dude ranch but a health resort.

He had a number of offers from booking agents, but, with the exception of one from London offering $2500 a week for himself and company, not one paid anything like what he had been accustomed to. He directed me to write the London agent offering his services at $5000 a week. We heard no more from London.

Then he had an inspiration he thought heaven sent. It was bound to pay big dividends. Why not bring to the silver screen an authentic picture of the fight for the West? Within two days we were on our way to Denver.

Both Bonfils and Tammen, after listening to the Colonel, thought well of the idea. The Secretary of War who happened to be in Denver was persuaded that it was a good idea to preserve for posterity the historic record of the Indian battles of the West. The Colonel pointed out that some of the figures of those early days were still alive. There was General Miles for one. The Secretary amiably agreed to let the Colonel have a regiment of cavalry, some old uniforms, and other War Department matériel for the pictures.

Tammen and Bonfils interested the Essanay Film Company in the project, and the W. F. Cody Historical Pictures Company was formed, with the Colonel holding one-third of the stock for his efforts in organization and for the supervision of the film.

The day negotiations were concluded, he returned to the hotel full of high spirits. "The ol' man ain't through yet, Dan," he said jovially. "Now that the money boys're with me, I'll do something."

We made a whirlwind trip to the TE, where we searched out some of the Colonel's relics of his scouting days—buckskins, a battered hat, some old guns, and other odds and ends. Then we set out for the Pine Ridge Indian Agency in South Dakota, where the movie cameras and technicians had already arrived. A day after we got there General Miles and five other generals appeared. The Sioux Reservation furnished the Indians, among whom were Irontail, whom I had persuaded to see the doctor in the old Show days, and many others who had trouped with the Show.

Entire Indian villages were set up along Wounded Knee Creek. Cavalry mingled with hundreds of Indians. Generals were a dime a dozen.

The Indians weren't happy. They were sullen and uncooperative. They could not see things from the white man's angle. They were not actors. They refused to follow orders and looked at the director with unconcealed contempt. The Colonel, Johnny Baker, who had come to help handle the Indians, and I knew the reason for that, or at least part of the reason. The Indians didn't want the graves of their fallen ancestors of Wounded Knee disturbed. That was taboo. But General Miles, with the usual unimaginativeness of the army man, insisted on literal accuracy. He wanted the graves dug up so the Battle of Wounded Knee could be on the very ground that had borne the original battle.

We breathed more easily after Johnny's masterful efforts with the Indians appeared to be successful. Yet the three of us, if no one else, were sure that the Indian bad feeling had not entirely been soothed. The Colonel once said, "I don't like the way those Injuns act, boys. Let's keep our eyes peeled. We don't want nuthin' bad t'happen."

General Miles' insistence on accuracy was creating other problems for us. His insistence was honest enough. Yet it could have no value for the picture. We must have the exact number of troops that had participated and must use exact locations of incidents that had not occurred at Wounded Knee but could just as well have been staged there. He was adamant and had to be satisfied or carefully deceived before the filming could proceed.

But in spite of all the difficulties, natural ones and those thought up by the General, Uncle Bill held up bravely. At last we arrived at the eve of filming the battle scenes.

I could feel trouble again among the Indians. Johnny voiced his disquiet, too. The Colonel nodded gravely to our recital of fears. "Let me know if yuh can put yuhr hand on somethin'," he advised.

It must have been about ten that night when I heard someone fumbling at my tent flap. I quietly climbed out of my blankets and drew my gun. Prepared, I pushed the flap back. In the light of a nearby fire I could make out that my stealthy visitor was an Indian.

"Put 'em up!" I commanded. The Indian obeyed immediately.

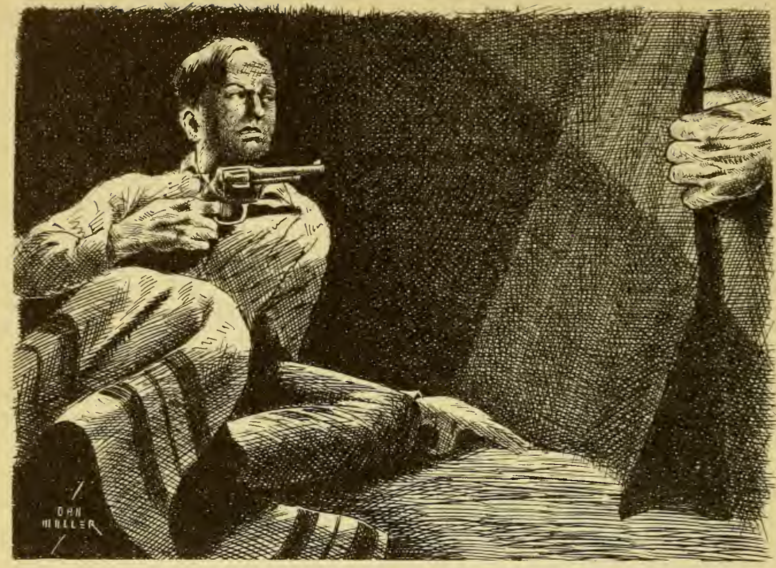
"Dan," he said. "Me Irontail. Me talk with you."

I drew him into the tent and lighted my lantern. Johnny, who shared the tent with me, was about some late business of preparation. "What can I do for you, Irontail?" I asked.

"Come sun, come trouble," Irontail voiced solemnly. "Heap trouble."

"You wait," I told him. "Me get Pahaska."

"Ugh," he said, "Irontail wait."



I quietly climbed out of my blankets and drew my gun.

I pulled the Colonel and Johnny away from a conference with the director and the General. They were, as usual, violently disagreeing about the morrow's picture taking. I said nothing as we strode the distance to the waiting Indian chief.

"How, kola, Irontail," the Colonel said, halting in the entrance to the tent.

"Kola, Pahaska," Irontail replied somberly.

"Yuh have news for me, Irontail?"

"Heap big news, Pahaska. Picture next sun be big trouble. Men die."

The Colonel released his hold of the canvas flap and entered. "Set down, Irontail. What trouble come with sun?"

The Indian chief sat on the edge of a cot and Uncle Bill sat down on Johnny's cot facing him.

"Our young men have hard heads," Irontail began. "Dress for war. They feel like war. They say Injun, many snows ago, not want fight. But white sojers kill Injun. Kill women. Kill papoose."

That was a pretty accurate if brief description of the actual events of Wounded Knee. The Colonel looked at Johnny and me, then turned back to Irontail. His face was deeply concerned.

"What d'yuh think the young men do?" he asked.

"Young men have real bullet. When picture machine she turn, they kill white sojers. Then, young men say, Injun ancestors in grave rest easy."

"Goddam!" the Colonel got to his feet and stared down at Irontail. "They gonna make a real battle of it, hey?"

"Young men say get even with white sojers."

The Colonel turned worried eyes on us. "God knows I don't blame 'em," he said. "But we can't let that happen." He turned again to Irontail. "Irontail, can yuh get the old men together? We hold powwow?"

Irontail rose slowly to his feet. He gathered his blanket around him. "Can do, Pahaska. Bring-um here?"

"No," the Colonel said, looking at the narrow confines of our tent. "Bring 'em to the chow tent, Irontail. And get 'em there's fast yuh can!"

We hurried to the chow tent, pushed back the trestle tables, and arranged everything for the powpow. The Colonel didn't call anyone else in on the deal, trusting himself to handle it better without General Miles or any of the other army men.

We had a long wait. I made some coffee, but none of us, though we drank all I made, knew whether it was good or bad. Then we just sat, saying little. The time lagged heavily. Midnight passed and time still dragged slowly on.

"Do you think," Johnny asked once, "Irontail can't get the other Indian chiefs here?"

"I think Irontail'll get 'em here," the Colonel said. "But it's damn' slow waitin'."

Irontail and five of the other older chiefs put in appearance about two-thirty. They came in and squatted down without saying a word. Irontail squatted last.

The Colonel rose and faced them. He didn't say anything for a couple of minutes. In the yellow lantern light his white moustache and goatee, the ruddy complexion of his cheeks, his tall forehead, were impressive.

"I hear bad news of my red brothers," he began. "I hear wise men of Sioux can't control their young men. I hear young men shoot real bullets tomorrow. That heap bad. Some white men die, yes. Some hurt, yes. But the white man has many warriors. Injuns kill these few here, more white soldiers come. Many more soldiers. Many more than Injuns. More than leaves on tree. There be much shootin'. Many red brothers die. More Injuns die than at Wounded Knee. Why?"

It was Short Bull who spoke. "Young men say revenge. Say they have fast ponies. Say they get away."

"Yuh know better than that," the Colonel said, after a decent interval had elapsed. "Yuh know they can't run fast or far enough t'get away from white soldier. Injun hide. But come snow, come sun, the leaf fall, come snow again, and come sun again, the white soldier look, the white soldier kill."

No Neck grunted and his wordless comment was echoed by the others.

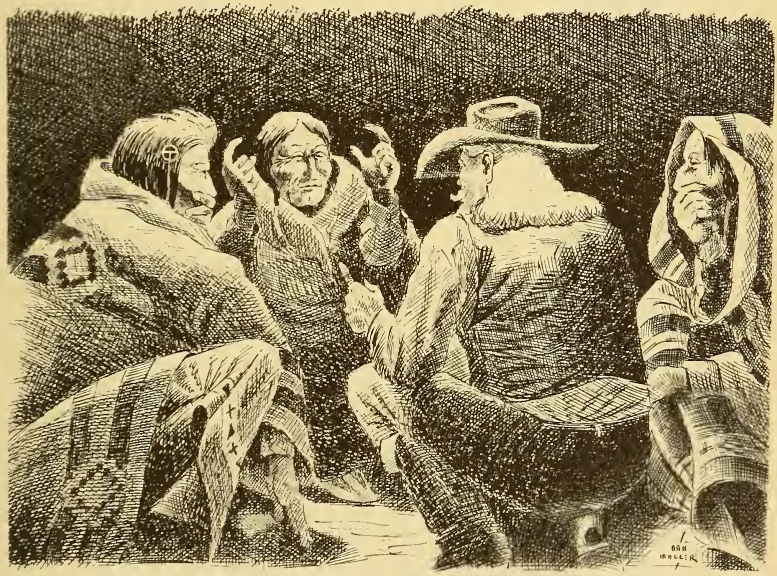
"You speak with straight tongue," Irontail commented.

"Why they do this?" the Colonel asked. "Why the young men go on warpath? Injun now get plenty food. White father take good care of Injun. Give him blanket. Give white medicine-man to fix Injun with strong medicine. Send papoose t'school. Now many snows come. Injun and white man live at peace. No fight. Yuh know what happens when Injun fight? Injun die. Peace is good."

There was a rumble of assent from the chiefs who sat immobile as if carved in stone.

"Different in old days. White man promise Injun and don't keep promise. But now white man keep promise. White man him treat red man like brother."

There was another rumble of assent.



"You speak with straight tongue," Irontail commented.

The Colonel went on. "In old days Injun chief tell brave he 'do this.' Brave he do this. Chief say, 'Stop,' brave he stop. Do I talk with chiefs?"

There was silence in answer to this question. A long silence. If Irontail, Short Bull, No Neck, and the other chiefs communicated with each other it was by means of telepathy. But presently the chiefs all rose. Irontail stepped forward.

"Pahaska speak not with forked tongue. We chief. Injun young men no shoot real bullets. We have spoken."

He turned, followed by the others, and walked steadily out of the chow tent. The three of us watched them out of sight in the first paleness of the morning light.

"God!" said the Colonel. He collapsed on a bench and wiped his brow with a bandana. "I wasn't sure I could do it."

We went back to our tents and flung ourselves on our bunks. I don't know whether the Colonel or Johnny slept or not. I didn't. And when the soldiers' bugle rang out on the frosty air, I was glad to get up.

I ate a mouthful of breakfast and then wandered down into the Indians' camp. The Indian women were busy about their cooking fires, and nearby the men squatted on their haunches. The young men, perhaps more sullen than usual, were nevertheless quiet. There was no sign of preparation for killing. There was no sign of preparation to move.

I took my observations back to the Colonel.

He nodded, satisfied at what I told him. "The chiefs have control again, Dan. Unless something happens to set 'em off, things'll go all right."

Things did go all right. We filmed the Battle of

Wounded Knee that day. There were war cries from the Indians and yells from the cavalrymen, the sharp banging of pistols, and the harsher notes of the rifles. White men and Indians fell in the battle, but it was only the semblance of death. No real bullets were fired that day.

During the next three weeks we shot the stories of other fights between white men and Indians. There was no trouble other than that caused by General Miles' insistence on accuracy. Before the time was up we learned to agree with him, to make him believe that we were exactly following his demands. Actually, many a scene he insisted upon was performed before empty cameras.

In the present day, the story of the Indian battles would have taken long months of preparation and filming. We took the pictures of a half dozen battles in three times that many days. Perhaps it would have been better if we had taken more time.

CHAPTER 25

A Tired Promoter Without Backers

AFTER the business of making movies there wasn't much left of the winter.

But there was enough time for the Colonel to get well soaked in alcohol before the start of the season. Reckless Davies was again called upon to sober him up and get him in condition for the season with the Sells-Floto Circus.

Just before we left the ranch to go on tour we saw the movies. They may have been historically accurate; but they weren't interesting. Groups of Indians and soldiers moved across the screen. The captions did little to explain what it was all about. From the knowledge I've gathered about movies today, I can see that two things were wrong. First, the story of those battles should have been told from the viewpoint of one man, so that the audience could identify themselves with that man and hope and thrill according to the difficulties and successes through which he passed. And, second, the unintelligible mass of pictured detail should have been cut to a minimum.

Uncle Bill got several offers to make personal appearances with the movie, but the offers were far below the level he was accustomed to. He made a few to publicize the picture, but took no booking. During the course of a year and a half through which attempts were made to show the movie in theaters, the returns did little more than pay the costs of production.

A copy of the movie was sent to the National Archives. As far as I know that is the only copy that still exists.

Sells-Floto was a cut-rate circus. The entrance fee was only a quarter. To make it pay, the circus had innumerable sideshows — freaks, human skeletons, fat women, and the like. Actually the circus was much like a carnival. The ticket sellers were expert short change artists and there were always pickpockets. The Colonel suspected that Bonfils and Tammen not only permitted these characters, but cut into their take. Many circuses of that day were not above such traffic.

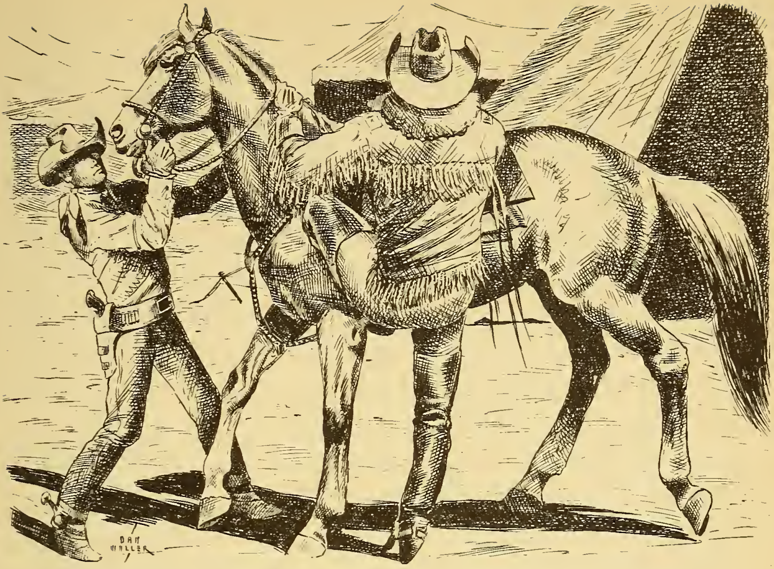
The Colonel's contract with Bonfils and Tammen called for an appearance in the parade, in which the Colonel rode in his fancy phaeton with the paint ponies, and an appearance on Isham during the Wild West Show. The Wild West part of the show was introduced as an extra performance after the regular program, which included only enough of it to act as a teaser. Uncle Bill got $100 a day and 40 per cent of the gross income over $3000 a day.

To start the season he had needed to borrow $2500; Tammen indorsed the note. To keep afloat despite the numerous demands made by mortgage interest payments, calls for money from the Big Horns, and the fees of the mining firms that were conducting a survey of the mining properties, he drew far in advance on both his regular pay and the percentage. It was, luckily, a fair year, but the Colonel did not take in, as he had in many years in the past, as much as $100,000.

Both the rheumatism and the prostate trouble made his mounting of Isham a nightmare. The neuritis in his hands was so bad that he could scarcely hold the reins. But he manfully endured each day of torture. The show over, I'd help him dismount and insist that he lie down in our little office tent. I strung mosquito netting around his cot so that the flies and other insects wouldn't bother him and guarded the front of the tent from the human insects that sought to pester the tired old man.

We talked a good bit during those times. He had enlarged on his dream of the dude and health center in the Big Horns. "I talked t'George Beck [the banker at Cody and for years a friend of the Colonel's] about buildin' the new hotel in Cody. He thinks maybe we hadn't oughta build more'n four stories. The De Maris people are interested, too. An' with all the free publicity the Cody Road entrance to the Yellowstone is gettin', Pahaska oughta pay off big, too. We'll enlarge Bobcat, and we'll give shows for the dudes over at the TE. The dice have got t'change, Dan. I'm gonna shoot naturals from now on. You watch, m'boy. We're gonna come out on top."

Sometimes he was bitter and would gripe about peo-



Rheumatism made his mounting of Isham a nightmare.

ple he thought had done him damage. Oddly enough — or perhaps characteristically enough — he complained of people who had been honest with him — Pawnee Bill, for example. He said once, "I jus' can't get over what Lillie pulled on me. He's money hungry. You loan a dollar from him and he wants his dollar back with fifty cents interest."

Lillie had been sharp but not dishonest.

On the other hand, he rarely complained of the immense cost the Dyer mine deal had been to him. When Johnny Baker had found that, though thirty men were on the payroll, only a few were working, the Colonel claimed that there must have been some special reason for that. Besides, Dyer was dead. The Colonel seldom spoke badly of the dead.

Sometimes he talked of the Sells-Floto Circus, which he violently disliked. "Harry Tammen sure don't know much about runnin' a show. I bet he couldn't run a good dog and pony show. Too many long jumps. An' there ain't 'nough variety acts. There ain't a star feature in the whole show."

"You're the star, Colonel," I told him.

"Not any more, Dan boy. I'm jus' a name. I'm an ol', tired man. Funny thing, though, when I'm most tired of all this traipsin' around the country, an' when I'm sick and can hardly get on Isham, I hear somethin' tellin' me not t'give up. T'keep on goin'." He raised on his elbow and his eyes were excited. "You wait, Dan boy, sooner or later my mine is gonna pay. The Irma is beginnin' t'hold its own, and the TE an' the other ranches should perk up." He settled back. After a moment he said, "What I need most is to personally manage things. They'd be run different then, yuh bet."

Another time he said, "You and I've gone through a good deal together, Dan. It sorta runs in the family, I guess. That no-good, wild-cat Pa o' yuhrs and I hit it off pretty good years ago. Yuh stick with me, Dan. We'll not only save somethin' out o' the Big Horns. We'll make somethin' mighty big for us there. Jus' yuh wait an' see!"

That season we had a Canadian schedule. We went in by way of St. Boniface, outside Winnipeg, and made all the towns west to Fernie in British Columbia. Then we came back into the States by way of Kalispell in Montana and played down to a close in Texas.

At the end of the season the Colonel was tired out. We got him up as far as Denver and laid over. The doctor I called said he needed to rest. I told that to Harry Tammen when he came around. But Tammen wasn't satisfied until he'd got the Colonel to sign a contract for the 1915 season. It wasn't a good contract for the Colonel, I later learned.

When we got to the TE early in November the new mine surveys were waiting for us. The engineers said there was maybe three million to be taken out of those mines, but that special machinery needed would cost more than $100,000. That report, asking for more money when he'd already sunk so much into the mine, discouraged the Colonel for several days. He didn't take part in his guests' story-telling and drinking sessions. Then, all at once, he recovered.

He had a new idea that he thought would raise a lot of money. He would put out a new autobiography along lines different from his previous one (done by a ghost writer) and from the biographies by Ned Buntline, Major Burke, and his sister, Helen Cody Wetmore. "Everybody knows Buffalo Bill, Dan," he enthused. "A new book will sell fast. Yuh write some of those Eastern publishers. I'll bet they'll grab at the chance."

So I wrote to several. We received courteous refusals.

World War I had started the August before, and the people with money were not interested in the Colonel's projects. Nothing but war profits attracted them. The Colonel's dude and health center idea left them cold. There just wasn't any money to be found for such a project.

Just the same the Colonel encouraged George Inman, a gunsmith of Cody, and me to go ahead with another building at the Bobcat. We cut our own logs for the walls and found our stone for the fireplaces that George built. We put in pole corrals and at the entrance a pair of massive pole gates. The Bobcat was only a mile from the TE, and the Colonel came often to watch and praise our work.

Uncle Bill thought that if he couldn't raise money in the West for his projects, it could be raised among his many friends in the East. So in midwinter he went to New York. He came back disappointed.

His finances were in bad shape. As his secretary I came to appreciate just how bad. I suggested that he declare a voluntary state of bankruptcy.

"Why, Dan boy!" he protested indignantly, "I ain't ever welshed on a debt yet. I ain't gonna begin at my time o' life. We'll pay off. We'll build the new hotel. The Irma, Wapiti, Pahaska, an' Bobcat'll all start makin' money soon, an' then I can retire from Show business and jus' stay here with yuhr Aunt Lou and see that things go right. Don't get scared, boy. We'll make out."

When his second season with Sells-Floto opened, I stayed at the TE to finish the building at the Bobcat. I hoped the Colonel was right and I wanted to do everything I could to make his dreams come true. There was a chance they might, I considered.

The new Cody Road had been built into Yellowstone Park, and it worked its way through the tall and beautiful Shoshone Canyon past the new government Shoshone Dam. Maybe the great hordes would come to visit the Park and Uncle Bill would be vindicated. They did. But the hordes came after he died.

This year the Colonel was getting a smaller percentage of the gross. The Sells-Floto of those days was a cheap circus. Some of its equipment wasn't safe, and the Colonel protested this again and again. Although the circus was not a good one, Bonfils and Tammen had raised the admission price.

Tammen resented the Colonel's constant complaints, and he resented, too, that the Colonel was writing to all his friends the condition of the Sells-Floto Circus. The climax came as the result of a flood at Fort Madison, Iowa. The audience was barely evacuated when it came. The Colonel was horrified at the danger to the audience and blamed Tammen for lack of proper care.

Tammen retaliated. He demanded full payment of all the money he had advanced to the Colonel, including the $20,000 lent him while the Colonel was with Pawnee Bill. The Colonel thought the sale of the Show had wiped that debt out. The money Tammen said the Colonel owed him included as well the $2500 note that Tammen had indorsed. The Colonel swore this $2500 had been taken out of his salary and percentage. But Tammen instructed his cashier to withhold $50 every day from the Colonel's pay.

He finished the year with Sells-Floto, but there was no question of a new contract, either in his mind or Tammen's.

As ever optimistic, he now had a scheme for a new Show, a New Wild West that would be his own. That year the Miller brothers had a show called the 101 Ranch out with Jess Willard, the heavyweight boxing champion, as their star. They were willing to sell their show for $65,000.

The Colonel wrote me glowingly of what could be done with the 101 Ranch Show. He set me to work writing his friends all over the country in the effort to raise the money to buy it. He sent me lists of the ones to write to.

He had big plans. The American people were deeply interested in the war in Europe. He would make of the 101 Ranch a great military spectacle, and he would employ wounded veterans from the Allied armies. He visited the Chief of Staff in Washington and tried to persuade him that a recruiting officer sent with the Show would get thousands of enlistments.

The recruiting officer was refused, but the Army would provide furloughs as well as guns and other equipment for the soldiers Uncle Bill signed to go out with the Show.

All he needed now was the cash to buy the 101 Ranch and enough more to start the season. In spite of his more than thirty years of immensely profitable showmanship, he couldn't raise it. His friends — those who had been friends when the Wild West Show was paying the Colonel anywhere from $100,000 to $400,000 a year — had no money to spare.

Johnny Baker, who had been playing in London while the Colonel was with Sells-Floto tried to sell for him the British rights to the Indian films, but could not. Major Burke, his beloved publicity man, who had been off the payroll for more than two years, bent every effort to help the Colonel. But Major Burke was old too, and his personal adversities had left him but a seedy remnant of his old dominant self.

Finally the Colonel sold his interest in the Indian films. But they were not popular and paid little. He succeeded in selling his autobiography for very little to a publisher who provided a ghost. No scheme was too fantastic if it promised money. He even took on the agency of several western states for a brand of canned heat.

But in the end all his efforts failed. He was unable to buy the 101 Ranch. Instead he signed to appear with them, bringing his military preparedness feature with him.

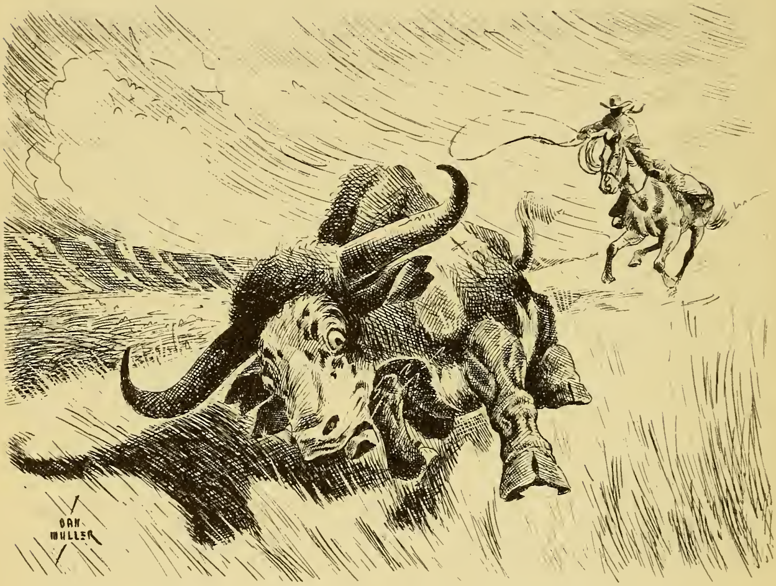
I hadn't gone out with Uncle Bill on his last year with Sells-Floto. Now I didn't want to go out with the 101 Ranch. Somehow, although I've never been in the Army, I didn't want any part of the Colonel's Pageant for Preparedness. Perhaps the experience with the army men in filming the Indian wars had soured me. I don't know. I wanted nothing to do with war or with the preparations for it. Nor did I want anything to do with May Decker in Cody. I wandered around the West but kept in contact with Uncle Bill.

He wrote glowing letters about his relations with the Miller brothers.

> "These boys can't do enough for me. If I say something would be good for the Show, well they go right out and try to get it. I make around $4000 every week—$100 every day and one-third of all the money they take in over $2750. I'm pretty sure now I'm going to be able to get back on my feet. How's everything with you, Dan boy? Just wandering around like you are, you may get caught short. You let me know, and I'll send you a poke to help out."

I was glad he liked the 101, because if the Colonel was at ease, I was too. I had felt conscience-stricken because I hadn't gone out with the Show. Now I felt free to wander in the West that I loved. I could try to get some of it on paper and canvas, and I could do it without worrying about failing in my duty and debt to the Colonel. I headed for the Southwest this time—farther south than I had ever been before.

In my months of meandering I learned that cattle and horses are worked differently in the Southwest than they are in the north country. I learned when to throw a wide loop and when a small one. I began to learn what it took, and that I had it, to ride the tall, stout horses of the Northwest and the smaller ones of the Southwest. I learned something of the many different ways of ranching. And I began to learn a little about the ways of folks. And most important of all I began getting those things in my drawings and paintings.



I learned that cattle and horses are worked differently in the Southwest than they are in the north country.

And then in Prescott, Arizona, I got a letter from the Colonel. He wrote:

> ". . . the debts are still there and I am ridden constantly by people who want to be paid. Haven't I paid enough? All those years of working hard in Show business, all the money that's come in. Where is it? Tammen still bothers me with his demands; they're nothing more than legal thievery. Lillie is suing me and I'm suing him. They've all made money on me. Why don't they let an old man alone. I'm old, Dan. I feel I ain't long for this world. And somehow I'm glad of that. But don't pay no attention to a wore-out old critter like me. How's the painting? Write to me, boy and tell me how're you doing."

I had a pack and a saddle horse. I sold them. From the route card he'd sent me I knew I could meet him in Chicago. I took the train.

CHAPTER 26

Faltering Giant

I MET the Colonel at the old Palmer House Bar. My heart ached at the sight of his lined face and the tiredness of his massive old frame. But he wasn't discouraged now! His letter to me must have been written in an isolated moment when he'd let the realities of his situation come out in the open.

He was glad to see me and as unconscious of the reason for my visit as if he'd never written that letter. His talk was full of the future. "When this season's over, Dan boy, I want yuh t'meet me at the TE. They's a lot of things t'do an' you and Johnny Baker are the two most dependable men I have. Another thing, boy. I want yuh t'do another painting of the TE with the changes we're goin' t'make there t'get ready for the dudes. We'll use it in the advertisin' and we'll try t'get the Burlington to use it in their books on the Yellowstone. I tell yuh, Dan, things're bound t'pick up out there. Why, we got the finest place in the world. It's damn' selfish of us not t'tell people about it.

"I think maybe this year we can raise the money to get started on the new hotel. I been figgerin' an' it seems t'me that if the De Maris people and I c'n raise a hundred thousand we'll be able t'build the slickest dude and health center the world's ever seen. It'll coin money, Dan. It's bound to!

"Why, the way I figger, within three years after we open, I'll be able to clear off all my debts. Things is lookin' mighty hopeful at Oracle, too. I had a nibble the other day, an' I think maybe I can sell it for as much as $200,000. I'll sure be happy when that day comes. Jus' sit there in the Big Horns winter an' summer, enjoyin' the finest country God ever made, an' nary a worry in the world. Why, I bet I live t'be a hundred, Dan, with things like that!"

His face was lined and careworn, but he was filled with the old spirit of hope. I couldn't help admiring the courage of his optimism. Another thing that excited him was that some oil surveys had been made in the Big Horns. Somehow he'd managed to get together enough money to invest a couple of thousand in the surveys. Like all his other investments, this one was on a future that was too far ahead.

His dreams were valid. It was only that he always dreamed too far ahead. Maybe it is necessary for the world to have some dreamers so that others can come along behind and enjoy what they dream.

Finally he confessed to me that he was short of cash because of the collectors his army of creditors set upon him. Later I questioned the Miller boys. One of them told me that Uncle Bill was so far overdrawn on his salary and percentage that when he quit the season he probably wouldn't have enough money for train fare back to the TE.

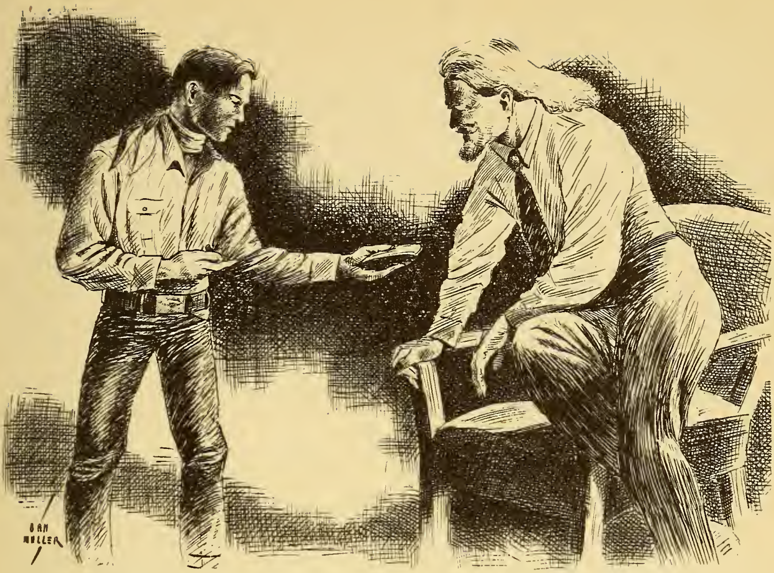
At last I managed to get up the courage to offer the Colonel the little poke I'd been nursing. I didn't need it, I told him. I was young. I could always get work in cow country. I told him to cache it away so that if things got bad sometime he would have that in reserve. "There's enough there to get you to the TE from any part of the country, Uncle Bill. I'm sorry it ain't more. But it might come in handy sometime."

I looked away from him because I thought I could see some water in his eyes. He was sure enough affected. He grabbed me and hugged me tight. For a minute I thought maybe he was going to kiss me. But he released me and walked over to the window.

"Dan boy," he said softly, keeping his eyes on the traffic below, "they ain't been more'n three or four people in all my life that was willin' t'reach out an' help me. There was Russell of Russell, Majors, and Waddell when I was a youngster, there was yuhr Pa, there's Johnny Baker, an' I know if he had it Burke would be willin' t'give me a lift. But all my life it's been the other way around. People always come t'me for help. My family . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands out in a gesture of helplessness.

He stood there by the window curtain for a couple of minutes without saying anything more. I tried to leave the room quietly, but he heard me open the door.

"Wait, Dan!" he said. He strode erectly across the



At last I managed to get up the courage to offer the Colonel the little poke I'd been nursing.

room to me, the poke outstretched in his hand. "I ain't a-goin' t'argue with yuh about this. You keep it. If I need it I'll wire yuh."

He forced the poke into my hand.

I spent several days with him in Chicago while the 101 played there. When he left he seemed in his usual high spirits.

I packed my roll of canvasses of the West and went on to New York. It seemed to me that now people would buy my work if I became known. And the place to become known then, as it is now, was New York.

Over the months when I was showing the dealers my work and trying to interest them in buying, I received several letters from the Colonel. He asked how I was doing and wanted to know if he should send me a little money now and then to keep me going.

To that I replied that I was doing right well, had plenty of money, and how was he? It wasn't true, of course. I went broke in New York and managed to scrape along only by lettering show windows and cards and picking up other odd jobs of that sort. But I refused to be another drain on the Colonel.

Toward the end of the Show season he wrote that he was very tired. He thought he would spend some time at May Decker's home in Denver to rest up before going to the TE. He wanted to know if I would meet him at the TE in January.

The 101 closed and the Colonel, like the trouper he was, played right through the last performance. While he was at May Decker's, I had three more of his letters.

He wrote that at May's he was spending a good deal of time in bed, but the rest was doing him good. Then:

> ". . . I'm not going to die for a long time yet. But when I do, as you know, I want to be buried up there in the Big Horns on Cedar Mountain, outside of Cody. The country up there is my country. It's part of me. I helped build it. And when the people of this country get to know the Big Horns for the marvel that it is, I want to lie there and hear the tread of their feet as they come to see what I've so long been telling of. I'll feel happy and rest easy if I know I'm among my own folks. . . . But I've got a long time yet. The old frame is a bit creaky, but it's still solid and firm. . . . Do you need money, Dan?"

CHAPTER

27

On Lookout Mountain Lies a Grave

ON THE morning of January 11, 1917, the cold, windswept New York street where I stood was dirty. But I saw hope in it for a change. I had money for breakfast and a paper because I had sold a picture the day before for ten dollars. As I stepped up to the newsstand I even thought, *maybe I can make a go of it here yet.*

But as my eyes dropped to the stack of papers and the bold black type of the headlines, I was so stunned I could barely give the boy his penny or grasp the paper he held out to me. The front page carried Uncle Bill's picture and the headlines announced his death. He had died at May Decker's home in Denver the day before.

It couldn't be. Why, only the other day I had heard *from him! No, it had been a little longer than that—and he had once mentioned, as if weren't important, that the doctor said he had uremia. And—he was seventy-one years old.*

I couldn't think what to do. I didn't realize that I couldn't do anything to help him now. The finality of death is a hard thing to grasp when one is first hit by a loss.

The milling, impersonal crowds that shoved past me seemed an affront. Wildly I felt that I must get out into the open and, most of all that I must talk to somebody else who had been close to Uncle Bill. But in New York there was no one for me to talk to. His friends there weren't mine and often I had not been sure they were his. But to go to May Decker's at such a time? No. Besides the funeral was to be the next day. I wouldn't reach there. And of course I didn't have enough money.

Months later I learned that Johnny Baker was in New York that day on a hurried money-seeking trip for the Colonel. No one will ever know what it would have meant to me if I had known it and could have seen him.

I don't know how long I stood on that busy corner, too dazed to do more than read and re-read the headlines. Finally I bought some more papers and took them to my bare little room and read them.

Aunt Louisa and Irma had been with him when he died. I was glad of that. There would be a big funeral. Yes, I thought, but it wouldn't be much good without the old master showman himself to direct it. They were going to bury him . . . on Lookout Mountain in Denver! But he had often told me and had written me so recently that he wanted to be buried on Cedar Mountain, overlooking the Big Horns. The paper quoted the decision to bury him on Lookout Mountain as his last request. How well I knew that wasn't true! I blamed Tammen and Bonfils. They would commercialize him to the last. However, arrangements and publicity had gone so far that I could see there would be no use for me to try to interfere now. I thought bitterly of how Uncle Bill would regret that his grave wasn't near the people come to admire his Big Horns. Instead, it would be a shrine to attract people to the city of Harry Tammen!

I couldn't bear the thought of staying in New York any longer. I threw together my few things and headed for a train. With what little money I had I bought a ticket westward. It landed me somewhere in Ohio, as I remember. I got some lettering to do.

It was days before I could bring myself to write to Aunt Louisa. I felt too close to her in her sorrow and mine to write what I felt, but I managed to get a few words down on paper. There wouldn't be much left for her, I supposed, but surely enough for her to live on. There was, it turned out, but that was about all.

I felt so alone that I didn't want to draw or paint or do much of anything. It was as though I'd been supported by Uncle Bill's faith in me. Now the support was taken away and I felt weak and helpless. Finally I pulled myself together, but it took a long time.

When Uncle Bill died I was twenty-seven—a cowboy and an artist. I've done what I could to remain both since then.

Although I failed to gain recognition for my art in

New York in 1917 and for some time thereafter I supported myself more with lettering and cowboying than with proceeds from the sale of my canvases, my art has sold over the years and today there is a steady demand for what I draw and paint.

In 1933, in a contest with two other western artists, I was chosen to do the three largest murals in the Transportation Building at the Century of Progress in Chicago. That went a long way in getting me established. How it would have pleased the Colonel!

In 1936 my first book was published. That would have pleased him too.

I've lived in the West and probed it for its innermost secrets, and those secrets I've given to the world in my canvases and in my books. People have liked the honesty and the authenticity of my work. My rope arm has now slowed up heaps, but not my writing and drawing arm. And, while I'll leave the tough broncs to the younger generation, I can still throw a leg over a gentle one and I'll be a cowboy at heart until I die.

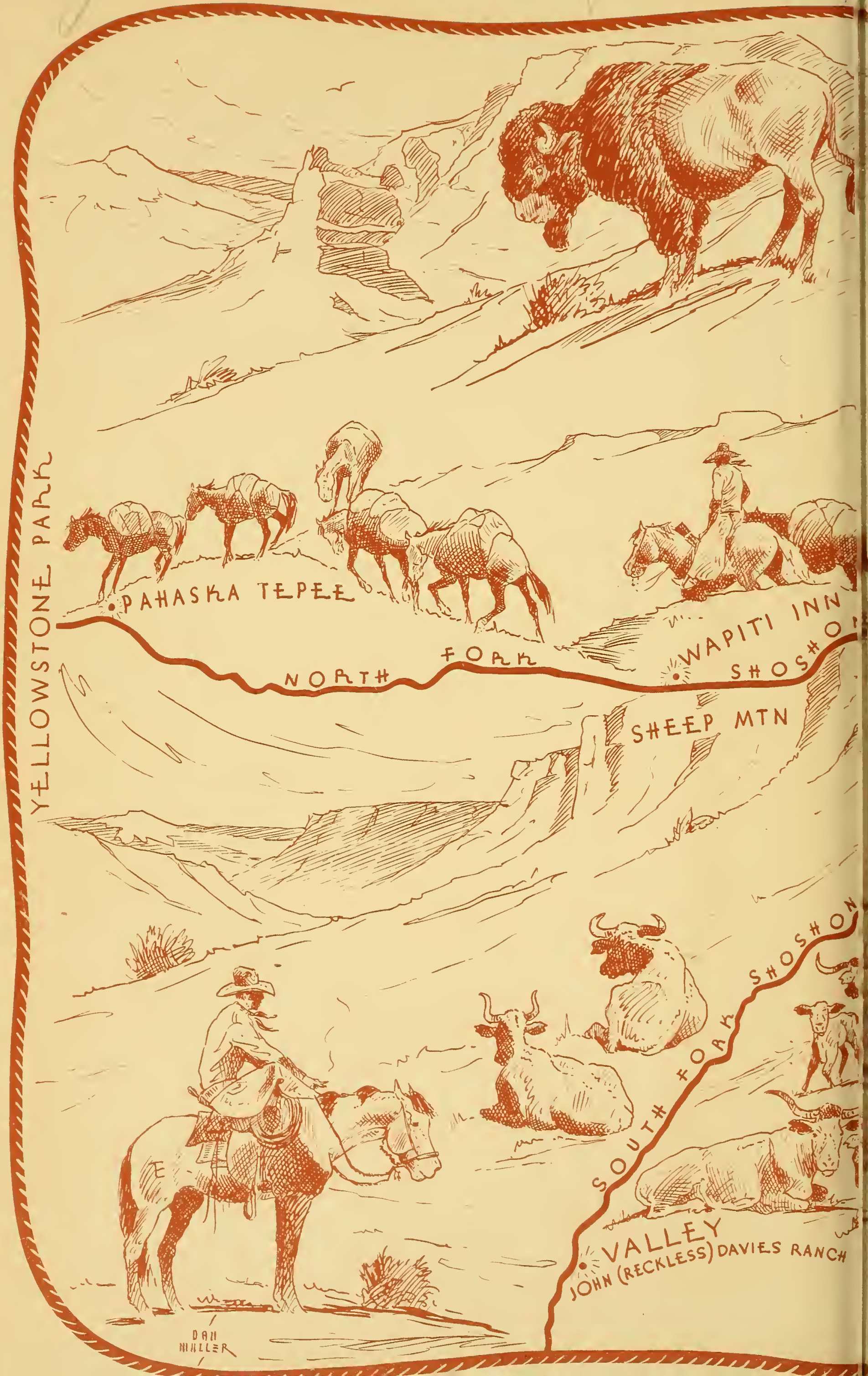
I suppose now at the end of my story I should try to make an estimate of this man who looms so large in my life. I can't. I was too near, too deeply affected by him to have the perspective necessary for an estimate.

I know that he somehow represented the early West. Carpers point out that he was an Indian Scout only until he was twenty-six and thereafter a showman. But he was a prince of showmen, and he carried in him so much of the feeling of the Old West that he made it live—for millions of people besides me.

I know he was vain, that he was often a drunkard, that he was often untrue to his marital vows. But if Aunt Louisa could forgive him those things I can too.

Whatever his faults, whatever his life, the essential bigness of the man was the bigness of the open spaces. The scores of people that loved him knew that.

I loved the Colonel for what he meant to me. He was strength, and he was dreams. He was magnanimity, and he was humor. And he was a symbol of the Old West.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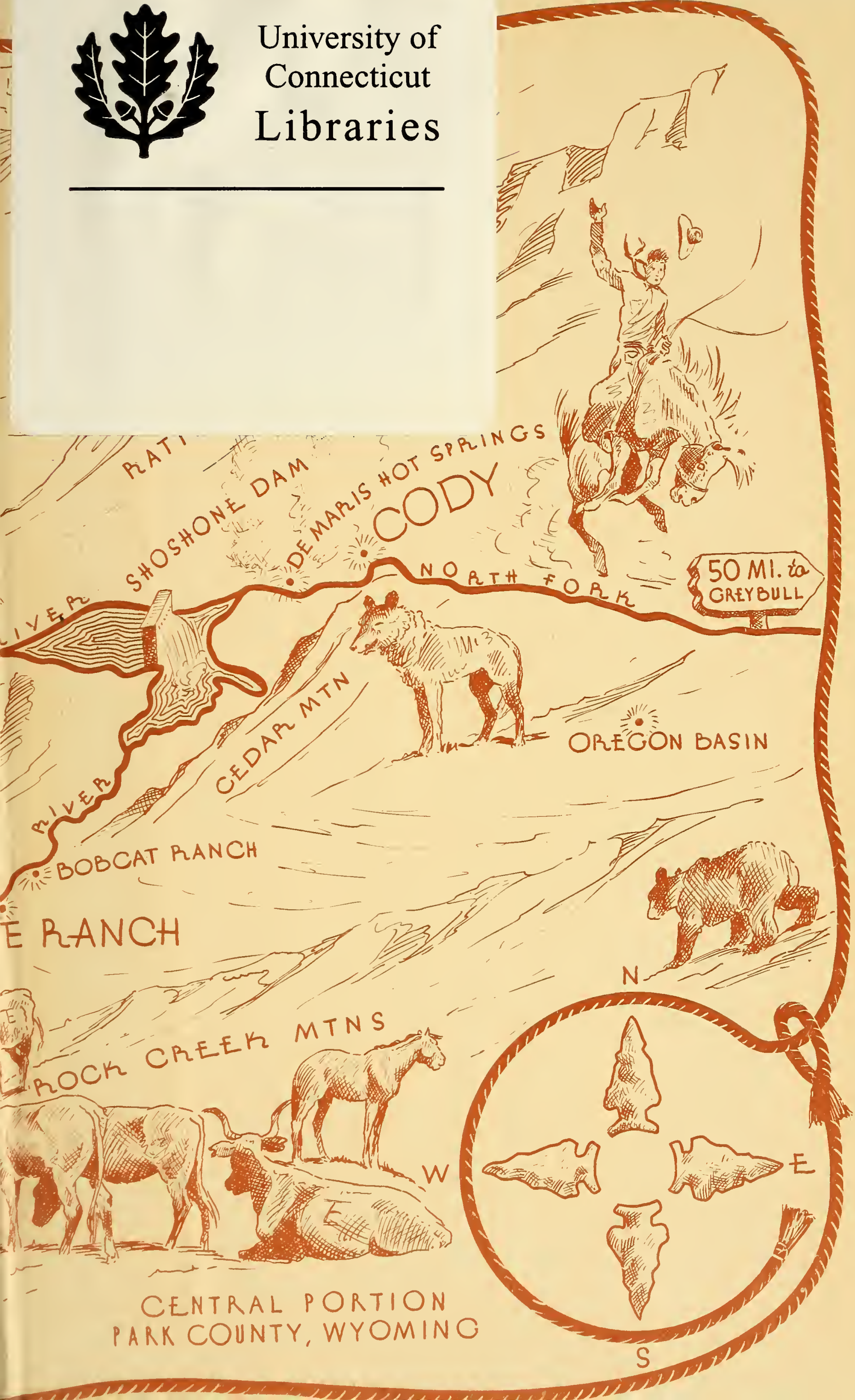
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